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How do young people interpret and construct risk in an online context?

[Volume 1]

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title (1)

Table of contents (2-5)

List of tables and illustrations (6)

Acknowledgements (7)

Declaration (8)

Abstract (9)

Key to abbreviations (10)

List of relevant legislation (11)

INTRODUCTION (12)

CHAPTER ONE: Theory and Context (28)

Introduction (28)

1.1 Risk and Sociological Theory (29)

a. Risk as symbolic/cultural (moral and emotional) (29)

b. Risk as global, individualised and a key feature of contemporary life (30)

c. Risk, governmentality & the self-managing neoliberal citizen (32)

1.2 Social context for the research: Children and Digital risks (34)

a. Criminal justice, legal and policing responses (41)

b. School and educational responses (43)

c. Technological responses (45)

d. Media and the press (46)

1.3. Themes from existing research and contributions to knowledge (48)

a. Risks: Them, Us and Me (48)

b. Emotions, trust and friendship (50)

c. Stigma, stereotypes and labeling (52)

d. Youth 'At-Risk' and in need of protection (53)

e. The Ideal Citizen as 'self-magaing' risk (54)

f. Risk and status: Exclusion and innovation (56)

g. Norms and Deviance (59)

h. Balancing rights: power, protections and freedoms (63)

Conclusion (65)

CHAPTER TWO: Methods (67)

Introduction (67)

2.1. Methodology and Methods (68)

a. Ontology, Epistemology and Research Values (68)

b. Ethnographic influences (70)

c. The 'researcher-tutor' role (73)

d. Methods (75)

e. Data gathering (80)

2.2. Logistics and Ethics (82)

a. Recruitment, strategy and sampling (82)

b. Cost, practical considerations and resources (85)

c. Access, gatekeeping and consent (86)

d. Child protection, safeguarding and disclosures (87)

e. Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection (90)

2.3. Project Development (90)

a. Amendments to the research design (90)

b. Data analysis (92)

Conclusion (95)

CHAPTER THREE: Labelling, judgement and meaning (96)

Introduction (96)

3.1. Legal terminology/labels (97)

a. Harassment (98)

b. Terrorism and threats (99)

c. Hate crime/hate speech (101)

d. Racism and xenophobia (103)

e. Homophobia (105)

f. Misogyny, sexism and gendered/sexualised content (108)

g. Other legal risks (113)

3.2. Ambiguity, uncertainty and interpreted meaning (114)

3.3. Moral, emotional and aesthetic judgements (121)

Conclusion (130)

CHAPTER FOUR: Relationships, proximity, power and status (131)

Introduction (131)

4.1. Tagging, targeting and identification (132)

a. Identifying sex victims (132)

b. Identifying child victims (134)

c. Defamation (libel) (136)

d. Threats and hate speech (137)

4.2. Relationship and proximity (140)

4.3. Power and status (144)

a. Age (144)

b. Fame (150)

4.4. Responsibility (153)

a. Subject/Victim responsibility (153)

b. Sender/Perpetrator responsibility (157)

Conclusion (160)

CHAPTER FIVE: Justifications and Neutralisations (162)

Introduction (162)

5.1. Actions vs. Words (163)

5.2. Privacy, publicity and visibility (168)

5.3. Freedom of speech (174)

a. Humour, jokes and banter (177)

b. Truth and Falsehood (177)

c. Opinion (181)

5.4. Justice, victimhood and retribution (185)

Conclusion (187)

CHAPTER SIX: Imagining consequences (189)

Introduction (189)

6.1. Perceptions of formal social controls/sanctions (189)

a. Police action and criminal consequences (189)

b. Points of reference for criminal consequences (195)

c. Risk of litigation from victims (197)

d. Risk of litigation from school (200)

6.2. Informal social controls/sanctions (204)

a. Social Media companies (205)

b. The school (205)

c. The Family (208)

d. Friends, peers and reputation (212)

6.3. Perceptions of no consequences (216)

a. Impunity and ambivalence (216)

b. Denial (219)

c. Post-moral denial and the collective (220)

d. Post-moral and post-truth denial (221)

e. Apathy, denial and deviance: Justifications for intervention? (222)

6.4. Ethics & consideration of consequences for others (224)

a. Harm to subjects/targets (225)

b. Harm to potential audiences (227)

Conclusion (228)

7. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS (230)

Summary of key findings (230)

Future implications (261)

VOLUME II: Appendices and Bibliography (264)

List of tables and illustrations (page number)

Fig. A: Media Lives by age: a snapshot (Ofcom, 2017: 2) (34)

Fig. B: EU Kids online: A classification of online risks to children (Hasbrink et al, 2009: 8) (37)

Fig. C: 'How do children engage with the Internet?' TedX Talk (Livingstone, 2015) (38)

Fig. D: Summary of relevant legislation used to prosecute cases involving communications sent via social media in England and Wales (CPS, 2018) (41-2)

Fig. E: Grid-group model (Douglas 1992: 262, appearing in Arnoldi, 2009) (57)

Fig. F: Parental rights and duties as outlined in the Children's Act 1989, adapted from Allen (2005:23) (63)

Fig. G: Table of example stimuli posts for discussion (A-L) (also appears in Volume II, for reference purposes) (77-8)

Fig. H: Sampling breakdown (84)

Fig. I: Example of quotations/field notes in typed format (see Appendix 2 for full data set) (92)

Fig J: Risk categorisations for posts with racist, homophobic or sexist sentiment (102)

Fig. K: Total risk ratings by gender makeup in response to post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") (113)

Fig. L: Modes of response to risk - adapted from Parker and Stanworth (2005: 321) (259)

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Declaration

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Abstract

This research provides an interactionist analysis of the ways that young people interpret and construct risk in relation to messages posted on social media. The focus is not only what kinds of content or conduct are considered to be more or less risky, but also why and how these perceptions may emerge. It builds upon previous studies into children's use and experiences of technology (including 'risky' behaviours, such as sexting and cyberbullying) by engaging with theories relating to the social construction of risk, criminological theories of deviance, and current legal frameworks governing social media (mis)use in England. Findings are based on verbatim quotes gathered from 184 pupils, aged 11-18, during fieldwork in two schools. Groups of participants discussed 12 examples of online posts and categorised the associated risks for an imagined sender (criminal, civil, social or none). Findings show individualised narratives of blame and responsibility are common, including for targets of online abuse, along with techniques of denial and neutralisation, as well as symbolic attempts to control and define 'meaning'. Most notable is the lack of consensus among participants' perceptions of criminal conduct online, and the extent to which competing narratives, perspectives, truths and norms were largely accepted. A multitude of factors influenced risk perceptions (e.g. sender-subject relationship, proximity and status, past actions or future consequences of actors, and assessments of responsibility, injury and choice), most of which were unknown or imagined contexts. This research asserts that law, critical criminology and human rights therefore ought to form a central part of digital citizenship education in schools. At the same time, this study highlights how competing social, political and cultural discourses likely contribute to uncertainty around what is 'risky' or 'deviant' online, and that this is not an issue exclusively affecting 'youth' today.

Key to abbreviations

CEOP	Child Exploitation and Online Protection command
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
DPP	Director of Public Prosecutions (Alison Saunders at the time of writing)
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FOI	Freedom of Information (e.g. requests for data under FOI Act 2000)
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HRA	Human Rights Act
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OPCC	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health and Economic education
UKCCIS	UK Council for Child Internet Safety
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

List of relevant legislation

S16 Offences Against the Person Act 1861

S49 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933

S1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978

The Contempt of Court Act 1981

S19-29 Part III of the Public Order Act 1986

3A of the Public Order Act 1986

Education Reform Act 1988

S1 Malicious Communications Act 1988

S160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988

The Children's Act 1989

Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992

S2-4 Protection from Harassment Act 1997

S28-32 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

S45 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999

S127 Communications Act 2003

Education and Inspection Act 2006

S13 of the Education Act 2011

Defamation Act 2013

S76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015

S33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015

Modern Slavery Act 2015

Data Protection Act 2018

Introduction

"Little is known about how youth perceive on-line activities and their view of their moral and ethical responsibility engaging on-line… Such knowledge on how adolescents perceive on-line behaviour can be incorporated into values and character education to address specifically on-line aggression. By knowing how adolescents judge events online, educators can design more effective developmentally appropriated educational tools that address students' perceptions and educate them on the risks of using digital media and the consequences of on-line actions as well as promote student awareness and prevention of cyberbullying" (Talwar, Gomez-Garibello and Shariff, 2014: 127).

Background to the research proposal

This research arises from an educational project in secondary schools called ''Online and Social Media Law and Ethics', run in conjunction with a local media company and funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). The project involved me developing new training (in the form of interactive assembly presentations and in-depth workshops) on the legal aspects of misuse of social media (Surrey PCC, 2013). The purpose of the project was to try to potentially reduce the number of incidents of online victimisation and offending among young people by providing clear education about UK laws, both criminal and civil, governing social media communications – an aspect often absent from other school digital literacy initiatives. The training covered both legislation and case law relevant to:

- Offensive, malicious, abusive and threatening/menacing communications
- Online/digital harassment and stalking
- Terrorism (material encouraging/glorifying acts)
- 'Hate speech', hate crimes and material inciting hatred
- Indecent images of under-18s and so-called 'revenge pornography'
- Contempt of court issues (e.g. anonymity provisions or reporting restrictions)
- Defamation (libellous material)
- Privacy and Data Protection
- Copyright and Intellectual Property

During the first year of delivery in 2013, I spoke with more than 9,000 students aged 11-18 years' old and became increasingly fascinated with their perspectives and understandings of the law in relation to social media. The design of the workshop sessions in classrooms allowed me to listen to young people's discussions of various example online posts and their deliberations on whether they felt it would be a criminal, civil, or simply an ethical matter. Like many social researchers before me, it was this informal participant observation within a professional context that became a motivating factor for undertaking formal academic research in this area. The research design almost exactly mimics my professional practice during this project; firstly, because this was essentially a tried-and-tested method I knew would work within schools, and secondly, because I was confident it would provide rich data on young people's views on the risks of social media misuse.

The project involved me going into schools and delivering workshop-style sessions with between 15-25 pupils lasting roughly an hour. The students are divided into small groups (of up to five) and each group is given a couple of examples of online posts, which have been mocked up to look like a message shared publicly on social media. These are designed with the intention of representing a variety of potentially problematic online content, from very serious criminal offences (e.g. threats of violence, material stirring up racial hatred, sharing of a sexual video involving a minor) to milder matters affecting reputation (e.g. bragging of having a hangover while at school). Pupils are asked to consider how 'risky' they feel it would be for a sender to publish each of the posts, and to discuss this in their groups. They are provided with four categories of risk to consider (Criminal/Red, Civil/Orange, Social/Yellow and None/Green), represented by a traffic light colour scheme, and asked to decide which category they think each post belongs to, and to elaborate on why. Students' responses to this activity are essentially what prompted this research proposal, as the resulting comments and discussions emerging from this method were simply too interesting not to share.

We live in an era where concern about the risks of the digital world, particularly in relation to young people, is at a peak. Numerous studies have raised concerns about young people's emotional, social, physical and mental wellbeing and development being adversely affected by new technology, with news media coverage invoking a strong risk management narrative in their reporting of these (see, for example: MacDonald, 2018; Wakefield, 2018; Chandler-Wilde, 2018; Selgren, 2018; Pasha-Robinson, 2017). This manifests in calls for 'more to be done': on a micro level,

pressure upon parents and schools, and on a macro level, upon governments and big tech companies. A multitude of stakeholders are invested in developing 'solutions' to the 'problems' of communication technologies, but much of the discussion overlooks the perspectives of the majority stakeholders: young people themselves, who represent both major consumers and producers of online content. This thesis explores youth perceptions of the criminal, legal and social risks of posting potentially problematic content online, whilst also investigating the *perspectives* underpinning some of those ideas about risk. The aim is to be able to contribute theoretically informed, policy-relevant conclusions to ongoing debates regarding young people, new communication technologies, and risk management options across legislation, regulation and education.

The thesis provides an interactionist approach to investigating how young people perceive 'risk' in relation to content posted online, for example via social media (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). Specifically, it provides an exploration of the ways that participants interpret, construct, negotiate, debate, justify and judge how 'risky' certain types of content and conduct are in an online context. The constructivist approach involves positioning risk as *a social construct* (hence the scare quotes), meaning that risks are not being considered as if they were objective, universal and fixed, but instead as being subjective, diverse/varying, and fluid (Lupton, 1999a). That is not to say that risks do not exist in a 'real' and material sense, but asserts that our understanding of them is always influenced by social, cultural, moral and political contexts. The interactionist approach involves positions meaning-making (knowledge, understanding) as a continuous (ongoing) and collaborative (social) process, reliant upon interactions. This acknowledges that the production of knowledge, including the process of doing research, involves researchers and participants as *co*-creators, and in turn that young participants are co-creators of meaning within their own groups. This means that the specific subject of study needs to be those *interactions* (language, discussion, conversation) that mediate the meaning-making process. This approach also acknowledges that a researcher cannot assert evidence of any 'fixed' or prevailing attitudes, but provide a rich and detailed snapshot of a particular group, at a particular time, in a particular context, and must incorporate theory in order to make any general conclusions.

The aim of the research is to investigate what kinds of content or conduct young people consider more or less risky in an online context, and why. The aim was also to investigate how certain constructs and narratives about risk emerge, and how these

may relate to broader perceptions (for example, perceptions of law and policing, power and authority, rights, freedoms and responsibilities, proximity, relationships and status, and the online/digital environment more generally). Overall, this thesis attempts to draw theoretical conclusions about what youth peer group discussions can reveal about norms and perspectives that underline perceptions of risk (or perceived *lack of* risk). The aim is to develop potentially useful insights for schools, families, policy makers, lawmakers and law enforcement, technology companies and anyone invested in young people and their digital social lives.

Structure

In this Introduction section, I will provide an overview of the rationale, scope and purpose of this research, the theoretical framework, key paradigms, research questions, design and methodology, and the original contributions to knowledge proposed within the thesis.

In Chapter One, I will provide a review of the relevant literature relating to the social construction of 'risk', young people, and new digital communication technologies, highlighting common themes, significant empirical studies, key gaps in existing knowledge, and the main theoretical traditions underpinning my approach. I will also attempt to provide an overview of the social context for this research, including existing legal and educational frameworks, plus the technological and cultural influences relevant to this particular subject matter. I will also explore the three key approaches to analysing risk as a subject of sociological study, as outlined by Lupton (1999a), namely: Symbolic/Cultural, Risk Society, and Governmentality.

In Chapter Two, I will elaborate on the main methodological approaches influencing this research, outline the key research values, innovative methods and design, and discuss the primary methodological, practical and ethical challenges involved in this work, including how they were navigated. I will also discuss common social research concerns such as sampling, access/gate-keeping, and research ethics, which are particularly complicated within this study due to the young age of participants, the research location of the school, and the sensitive/criminal subject matter.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the empirical findings that relate to processes of labelling, judgement and interpreting meaning of online content by young people. This will explore to what extent participants use legal terminology or labels, and how this sits within legal frameworks governing online content. It will also investigate

indications of moral, emotional and aesthetic responses among participants, and considerations of ambiguity, uncertainty and subjectivity when ascribing meaning to an online post.

In Chapter Four, the analysis will move onto participants' considerations of how the relationship between an imagined sender and subject/target affects perceptions of risk online. This includes hierarchy as well as proximity, so how differences in age, fame, power and status might influence their assessments, as well as how sender and subject/target responsibility is constructed and distributed.

In Chapter Five, the concept of 'neutralisations' or justifications for online content will be explored. Specifically, this includes participants' imagined reasons and defences for online posts, whether they relate to perceptions of individual rights (such as freedom of speech, truth, expression of opinion etc.), doubt over sincerity, injury or victimisation (posts being humorous, lacking in visibility or impact, and the notion of 'just words'), or the notion of retaliation, justice and the 'deserving' subject/victim.

In Chapter Six will focus on the imagined consequences of online content, exploring how participants construct risk in terms of formal or informal sanctions brought against a sender, and by whom, as well as interrogating perceptions of 'no consequences' (apathy, impunity and denial), as well as the potential impact upon others, whether they be subjects/targets or an online audience.

Finally, in the Conclusions chapter, I will summarise the key findings from this research and the potential policy implications. The ways in which young people construct risk and responsibility online has the potential to impact policy developments and approaches to addressing online safety across the fields of law, policing, technology and education. In addition, I will outline potential opportunities for developing further research in this area and how this work has contributed to knowledge.

Research topic, rationale and approach

Use of the internet, social media and digital communications have become an integrated part of the daily social lives of many children in the UK, with young people currently constituting the most digitally connected age group globally[1] (Ofcom, 2017;

[1] UNICEF defines 'youth' as those aged 15-25, and those under the age of 18 as 'children and adolescents'. Distinctions between terms such as 'child', 'adolescent' and 'young people' are

Unicef, 2017). While some adults may continue to construct digital and online behaviours as 'different to' or 'separate from' offline social interactions, young people do not always perceive this as a clear divide (Subrahmanyam and Smahel, 2011). There are numerous potential opportunities and risks for children growing up in the digital age, and this presents additional challenges for adults who are responsible for them - whose youth was not spent online (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009). This has raised questions and debate about the management of young people's digital experiences, with online risk to children positioned as both an objective threat *and* as a moral, social and political construct – or even 'panic' (Savirimuthu, 2012; Cesaroni, Downing and Alvi, 2012; Gabriel, 2014). The emerging agenda is one of allocating responsibility to – or responsibilising – various groups, be they technology companies, parents, schools, government, the police or even young people themselves. The preferable model is presented as anything that 'maximises opportunities', while 'minimising risks' for young people using social media, digital technologies and the Internet (Growing Up Digital, 2017).

Over the past decade or so, media and academic attention and the associated risk narratives have expanded from initially focusing on threats to children from adult strangers (e.g. grooming from online paedophiles), to also include concern about peer-to-peer digital victimisation (e.g. 'cyberbullying' and 'sexting') (see for example: Shariff, 2015; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey, 2012). There has been greater recognition of the child as a digital actor, with agency to create, explore and share online, not simply a passive recipient of others' content (Buckingham, 2007a; Livingstone, 2009). This in turn has focused attention upon young people as potential perpetrators of digitally-enabled harms, positioning them as not only potential victims, but also potential cyber *offenders* (e.g. Strom, Strom, Walker, Sindel-Arringdon and Beckert, 2011). The topic of cyber-enabled abuse among young people has been studied empirically, as well as theorised by legal scholars, yet few studies have *combined* the two, analysing qualitative data gathered with young people using legal or criminological frameworks (notable exceptions include Shariff 2009/2015; Salter, 2017). This research will attempt to contribute knowledge in this particular area, as well as investigate further how young people morally evaluate online behaviours, in line with calls for more research in this area (Talwar, Gomez-Garibello and Shariff, 2014).

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questioned as part of the social construction of childhood; see literature review for further discussion (Chapter 1).

This research therefore aims to investigate young people's perceptions of risk to a digital actor/sender (e.g. someone posting content online), using legal, criminological and sociological frameworks in order to contribute to knowledge. The legal framework will entail reference to legislation and case studies relating to misuse of social media communications, both criminal and civil, so as to position youth perceptions of the law within the social context of what laws actually exist. In terms of criminological references, this thesis seeks to position young participants as the *social audience* of online behaviour in accordance with the traditions of labelling theory, in order to interrogate how perceptions of responsibility, deviance and harm influence assessments of 'risk' in an online context (Erikson, 1962; Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973; Becker, 1973). Finally, the overarching theoretical framework will explore how ideas about the social construction of risk can shed light on how and why these perceptions may emerge (Lupton, 1999a).

Conceptual and theoretical framework

This research considers risk, crime and deviance as socially constructed. The focus is not only on what is considered risky or deviant behaviour online, but also why and how certain behaviours may be justified, condemned or neutralised by a social audience. Key frameworks include theories relating to the sociology of risk. These can be considered as three major approaches:

- Risk as 'Symbolic/Cultural' and moral/emotional (Douglas, 1982; 1986; 1992; 2002; Lupton, 1999a; 1999b; 2013),
- Risk as a defining feature of everyday life in late modernity/the 'Risk Society' (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; 1991; 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002),
- Risk as a technique of neoliberal governance, or 'Governmentality' (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996a; 1996b; Kelly, 2000; 2001; Trnka and Trundle, 2014).

Also relevant are theories relating to the social construction of crime and deviance. These include theories of how and why certain behaviours may be defined as problematic by a social audience (Kitsuse, 1962; Lemert 1967; 1981; Becker, 1973; 1995; Taylor, Walter and Young, 1973), while other supposedly deviant behaviours may be justified, or 'neutralised' (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Maruna and Copes, 2005) – and at other times deviance may be completely denied altogether (Cohen, 2001; 2008).

Risk, crime and deviance, as social constructs and subjects of sociological study, have significant areas of overlap. This is partly because the language used within policy, legislation and criminal justice has evolved, creating more of a blur between these constructs: Outdated terms such as 'delinquent' (used historically to describe particularly young people who truant or break the law) have been replaced with more contemporary labels such as 'at-risk'[2]. Similarly, behaviours once labelled 'deviant' for young people to engage in (e.g. smoking, drinking, sex or crime) are now more likely to be referred to as 'risky' or 'risk-taking' behaviours[3]. There are other similarities, too: Labels of 'at-risk' and 'deviant/offender' seem to carry particular weight when applied to adolescents, both are generally considered problematic (negative/unwanted), both appear to share similar socio-economic factors or 'causes', and most crucially both imply a requirement for action or intervention from an authority, in order to return children to a 'normal', 'healthy' and 'safe' pathway into adulthood (Tait, 1995; Kelly, 2000; 2001). Lianos and Douglas (2000: 261) argue it is "risk, not crime" in today's world that has become "the central culture register of social interaction", arguing that constructs of *danger*, rather than deviance, drive contemporary social control initiatives. Equally, there has been criticism of policymakers for framing online problematic behaviours among young people as 'threats', rather than considering them through a more traditional criminological lens, such as deviance, juvenile delinquency or sub-culture (Yar, 2005; Cesaroni, et al., 2012). Distinctions between constructs of risk, danger, crime and deviance quickly become complicated and 'messy', especially when explored through a social constructivist lens, and so this is one of the motivating factors behind this research utilising theoretical frameworks asserting risk as a social construct (sociology) *and* crime and deviance as such (criminology).

This research also takes a symbolic interactionist approach. Developed by George Herbert Mead (1918; 1934), John Dewey (1929) and Herbert Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism is primarily concerned with knowledge of human group life and human contact, and is underpinned by a number of key principles. Research is essentially constructed meaning(s), co-created through interaction between the participants and the principle investigator/author. A symbolic interactionist approach forces the researcher to embrace subjectivity from the start. Blumer (1969: 51) asserts, "if the scholar wishes to understand the action of people it is necessary for him to see their

[2] See for example: https://www.gov.uk/youth-crime-prevention-programmes
[3] See for example: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-and-young-peoples-risk-behaviours-discussion-paper

objects [in this case, social media risks] as they see them". In this sense, it less important to learn *about* young people (positioning them as pure 'subjects of study'), as it is to learn *from* them. The role of the participant is elevated to that of a co-creator of knowledge, which also adheres to the value of a 'participant-centred' approach to social research. Interaction and participation is required from the researcher as much as the participants, as their observations, interpretations and analysis will involve multiple processes of actively constructing and re-constructing meaning. This means that asking students to elaborate, clarify and explain, 'What do you mean?' 'Tell me more' etc., is an essential and equalizing part of this research.

Social interactions are seen as the fundamental core of social life, and this makes them the optimum subject of study, according to symbolic interactionism. Language is essentially a tool for sharing experiences, expressing perspectives and facilitating interaction. Research seeking understanding of social phenomena therefore needs to involve observation, participation and discussion (interaction). Involvement and participation from a researcher is greatly encouraged: "The person who participates [in the social world] will have greater knowledge... [And] the participant who is very observant will have fuller and more accurate knowledge" (Blumer, 1969: 38-9). Essentially, we cannot separate ourselves as researchers from the social world we are attempting to study. The subject of study in this research involves primarily dialectical processes (interpretation of spoken interaction) both between and among participants themselves, as well as between the participant and the researcher, adhering to the principles of symbolic interactionism (Crotty 1998; Charon, 2010).

In that sense, meaning making is also understood to be a collective, ongoing and active process, taking place in the present (although the past can be used as a point of reference). Essentially, meanings and perspectives are not fixed, pre-determined, predictable, universal nor automatic. Every situation and interaction among people is different from another, and researchers cannot therefore claim to 'know' much beyond their own specific research context(s) without the aid of theory. Participants' perspectives about risk vary according to the meanings interpreted within a given situation, i.e. the context and the content (influences might include the stimuli examples, peer group interaction, the researcher presence and questioning etc.) By embracing this approach, the researcher is able to adhere to research values, in terms of being critical and transparent with regard to the limitations and non-generalisability of the findings. Instead, the focus is upon providing rich and detailed

snapshots of a particular moment in time, with a particular group, in a particular context, and then using theory to extrapolate from that.

Key paradigms

Risk and responsibility are socially constructed concepts (Lupton, 1999a), as are notions of deviance and criminality (Becker, 1973), along with the very idea of 'childhood' vs. 'adulthood' (Jackson and Scott, 1999). Understandings, meanings and interpretations are formed within existing social, cultural, historical, political and moral orders, and are always influenced by them. Context is therefore an essential part of the study of perceptions or perspectives and we must look beyond the individual to when undertaking analysis of these. This is not to say that these are 'universal' or 'fixed' within a participant. Rather, meanings, perspectives and interpretations are essentially group constructs, and are understood to be fluid, in line with the principles of interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2010). Detailed 'snapshots' of research recording perceptions of risk and deviance therefore have the potential to shed light on broader social constructs beyond the individual through relating the data to theory, but cannot be used as predictors of behaviour nor indicate the existence of these attitudes lasting into the future.

Law is also essentially socially constructed, as is the concept of 'crime'; this is not to say that there are not very real and material consequences for people's lives as a result of crime, the courts, prison and policing, but rather to acknowledge that these concepts also serve a symbolic, moral and cultural purpose in society (Durkheim, 1895/2003). Legislation is created by subjective human beings and, even once passed, continually *interpreted* through judges, whose verdicts and sentences continue to (in)form case law. Legal challenges and reversals of decisions are not uncommon, neither are amendments to legislation, so in this sense the law is as fluid and evolving as many other aspects of social life. There is a symbiotic and symbolic relationship that exists between 'risk' and 'crime'; certain behaviours may be criminalised because they are considered risky, i.e. potentially dangerous (for example, using a mobile phone whilst driving). Equally, behaviours may be considered risky simply because they are illegal, but not necessarily because they are considered 'dangerous' or 'harmful' per se (for example, smoking marijuana) (Becker, 1973).

As such, it is important to consider the social reaction to behaviours (how they are perceived or responded to by different audiences) when considering constructs of risk and deviance. Labelling theory within criminology (Kitsuse, 1962; Erikson, 1962; Becker, 1973; Lemert, 1967; 1981) asserts that it is the *reaction* that dictates whether behaviour can be considered 'deviant' at all, particularly because at times the same behaviours may be considered acceptable – or not – depending on circumstantial factors. As Becker (1973: 9) puts it, "deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others or rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label". An interactionist approach reminds us that these 'perceptions' of normality or acceptability are fluid not fixed, meaning the boundaries (including between criminal and legal behaviours) are continually being negotiated, constructed, challenged, broken, bent or reinforced. Even if it was not the case that people's perceptions altered over time, the reality is that there is no homogenous 'social audience' of which to speak, regardless; Social groups tend to construct diverse and diverging norms and values, making the ultimate question, 'Deviant *from what* and *to whom?'* The research squarely positions young people as the social audience of interest, rather than lawmakers, law enforcement, parents, the family or education institutions.

Scope and boundaries of this research

This is a qualitative study based upon participant observation of focus group workshop sessions within two large, mixed-gender state secondary schools in the south of England between February and June 2016. A total of 184 participants aged between 11 and 18 years old took part, across nine sessions lasting approximately one-hour each, and with approximately 20 students in each session. As such, this research cannot necessarily generalise in an empirical sense on youth perceptions of online risk, nor will it attempt to present the findings as evidence of 'fixed' attitudes, nor predictors of online behaviour. Quotations from the discussions are analysed and interrogated as subjects of study in their own right, with the researcher attempting to neither condemn nor defend those who express them, instead aiming for an approach of 'critical respect' (Gill, 2007). Discussion of relevant criminal, legal and educational frameworks are included predominantly for contextual purposes (as useful points of reference within which perceptions of risk are situated), although at times the analysis may adopt a critical perspective of dominant narratives emerging from these

institutions. This thesis is not attempting to provide a comprehensive analysis, critique or defence of current English laws governing social media communications, nor the current education provision for young people regarding digital citizenship or safety awareness. The primary intention is merely to provide a detailed and rich 'snapshot' of youth perspectives on social media offending, deviance and risk, within the context of relevant laws and education for potential policy implications.

Research questions

The primary questions that this research attempts to address are as follows:

1. What kinds of content are perceived by young people to be 'riskier' or 'less risky' for a sender to post online, and why? What kinds of sender conduct are considered 'risker' or 'less risky', and why? What are the key factors or common aspects influencing how risky this content/conduct is perceived to be?

2. How do young people interpret and construct 'risk' in an online/digital context? In what ways are those assertions challenged or reinforced among a peer group discussion among participants, and on what basis?

3. What might these perspectives and interactions indicate about broader perceptions of the online/digital environment, law and policing, authority and power, responsibility, rights and freedoms, norms and deviance, etc.?

4. How do justifications of risk perspectives (e.g. labelling, condemnation, explanation, neutralisation or denial, in response to content/conduct) relate to existing theories of risk and deviance as social constructs?

Research design and methodology

Young participants were asked to respond to a total of 12 different examples of online posts, which were used as stimuli for focus group style discussions within nine different classes at two secondary schools. They were asked to consider four different categories of risk according to the traffic-light colour scheme previously mentioned: Criminal (red), civil (orange), social (yellow) and none (green). I took handwritten field

notes detailing verbatim quotations from young people during these discussions as part of an interactionist approach to studying how risk is socially constructed.

The aim of this research is to investigate young participants' perspectives of risk, with a conceptual framework that asserts that risk and deviance are both socially constructed. This justifies an empirical, qualitative and interpretative methodological framework. The methodological approach, combined with the ethical and logistical challenges of conducting research with children dictate that fieldwork within secondary schools was the most appropriate and effective approach to gathering data on this topic. An interactionist approach proposes that meaning (in this case, relating to 'risk') is constructed and conveyed via language, interaction and interpretation (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Strauss, 1993; Charon, 2010). This meant that the most useful subject of study (data) would be young people's social interactions (i.e. conversations) on the topic of risk online. Due to practical restrictions affecting the researcher's ability to observe these kinds of conversations amongst young people, while on school property, with minimal disruption to timetabled lessons, it was decided that workshop sessions combining participant observation, focus group and interview methods would be most sensible. This was reinforced by the researcher's own confidence to gather useful data this way, having designed and delivered dozens of workshop sessions within secondary schools as part of previous professional work, and piloted the note-taking process in the field.

Due to the potential for hugely detailed and in-depth qualitative responses from groups of young participants, it was essential for the subject matter to remain tightly focused upon risk in relation to content posted online, hence the decision to create and integrate 12 stimuli example posts into the workshops as a prompt for discussion. Students were divided into groups of 2-6 and given two examples to focus upon per group. The inclusion of coloured risk categories was another technique borrowed from professional practice in an attempt to focus discussions on the perceived escalating boundaries of risk (i.e. to think about criminality and the possibility of formal sanctions, as well as reputational, moral and ethical issues), and to prompt interesting data from where perceptions of these boundaries may differ within a peer group. The data – gathered in form of handwritten field notes - constitutes verbatim words and phrases used by students during these workshops, both between peers and to the researcher. These are transcribed for analysis along with observational notes from the researcher on social interactions (e.g. participant laughter, pauses, facial expressions etc.) where deemed significant. In addition, the use of risk

categories and stimuli examples allows for some contrasts and comparisons to be made during stages of analysis (e.g. younger students' increased use of lower risk categories compared to older students, gendered differences in response to post G which represented image based sexual abuse, etc.).

While it was impossible for these methods to capture all interactions happening all at once, or to capture any that participants did not know were explicitly being 'noted' by a researcher, they did allow for the research setup to remain as familiar as possible for the young participants. Students were located within their own classroom, with their peers, being provided with an activity involving group discussion and feedback. The aim of this research design was deliberately to be similar to an ordinary Personal, Social, Health and Economic education class (PSHE). PSHE classes are a common but not compulsory aspect of schools' curricula, intended to provide pupils with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive as members of society, essentially preparing them for 'life, not just exams'[4]. They are scheduled into timetables just like other subjects and may be led by existing school staff or external providers, and cover anything from drawing up a budget or meal plan, to applying for a job or putting on a condom. In this case, the educational subject matter was 'Social Media Law and Ethics'. Each classroom-style session was designed to include dedicated time at the beginning and the end for open questions from pupils, with the researcher taking on a 'tutor' role, in order to assimilate the research activity as closely as possible with the educational environment within which it occurred.

Contributions to knowledge

As previously highlighted, this thesis draws on two main areas of theory when investigating youth perceptions of risk online: from within sociology, theories relating to the 'sociology of risk', and from criminology, those relating to the social construction of crime and deviance. Using analysis of empirical data gathered with young people in schools, the thesis attempts to test the significance of the three major approaches to risk outlined by Lupton (1999a) ('Symbolic/Cultural', the 'Risk Society' and 'Governmentality') within the context of risk constructed in relation to material posted online. It will also seek to investigate the connections and overlap with theories of deviance through the ways in which potentially problematic online content may be condemned or justified, depending on the circumstances, by a young social

[4] See The PSHE Association for more: https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/

audience (Becker, 1973; Sykes and Matza, 1957; Cohen, 2001). Overall, this research concludes the strongest relevance is the recurring construct of the 'ideal' self-managing, responsible citizen as a technique of neoliberal governance, yet this is conceptualised as much (if not more) in relation to online *victims* and audiences, rather than senders who post content online (Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1999; Beck 1992; Rose, 1996a). The Symbolic/Cultural approach to risk analysis appears to hold the most relevance in terms of providing an exploration of how *social, cultural and moral* constructs, of both risk and responsibility, tend to influence youth perceptions more than the influences of law, policing, technology or education (Douglas, 1992/2002; Lupton 1999a; 2013).

This research also proposes new and innovative methodology, combining multiple aims (educational and academic) and multiple methods (participant observation, focus group, stimuli scenario response and interview). The numerous ethical and logistical challenges involved in undertaking this research, and discussion of how these were managed, provide valuable insight into the research process as whole. This includes development of ethical frameworks used to manage competing responsibilities of the teacher-researcher hybrid role, consideration of the use of recording equipment, and codes of conduct for working with children, including clear procedures for safeguarding and disclosures. Chapter two includes critical reflexive analysis of the stages before, during and after undertaking fieldwork with children in a school, and argues that methodological purity must be of secondary concern to both logistical realities and ethical responsibilities.

Empirically, this research hopes to contribute to ongoing efforts to include the voices and perspectives of children in policy debates that (directly or indirectly) potentially impact their digital social lives. The current generation of adolescences' use of digital technologies is considered to be distinctly different from that of adults, as well as being distinctly different from each other's' usage (e.g. continuing digital divides and diversity of experiences mean we must we wary of generalisation) (Ofcom, 2017; James, Davis, Flores, Francis, Pettingill, Rundle and Gardner, 2009; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig and Olfafsson, 2011). For this reason, ongoing empirical research of this nature is important for continued development of understanding broadly in this area. In addition, this research focuses explicitly upon young people's perceptions of the criminal, legal and social boundaries of acceptability in relation to (mis)use of social media, which is a fairly under-researched aspect of a very over-researched area (children and online/digital 'risk'). Rarely are young people's critical *perspectives*

on law, crime, policing and punishment sought specifically in relation to communication technologies, despite their *experiences* (particularly as potential victims) being seen as hugely relevant. The rich empirical dataset constituting verbatim quotations from 184 participants - in response to 12 example posts - is itself a valuable contribution to knowledge. This is particularly the case given the increasing number of ethical and access challenges facing researchers who wish to study both vulnerable groups (children and young people) and sensitive subject matter (crime, deviance and abuse) at once.

The policy implications for this research are multiple and relate primarily to digital literacy and education initiatives within schools, highlighting the need for greater inclusion of critical discussions of law, criminology and human rights frameworks in relation to online risk and responsibility. Older students in particular seem aware of diverging constructs of legality, acceptability and morality, which likely contributes to a shifting perspective of online risk as they age. There are serious safeguarding concerns relating to youth perceptions of the risk of disclosing information about child sex abuse, and uncertainty around the legality or morality of sharing indecent videos or imagery of children (example posts G and I). Questions of victim responsibility/culpability in relation to digital offending, particularly sexual offences, seem worryingly common. There is an argument for media industries, law enforcement and social media hosting companies to provide stronger counter-narratives to prevailing racist, homophobic and sexist/misogynistic expression online, as findings indicate that widespread tolerance of prejudice, threats and hate online exacerbate the perception that this kind of content poses few criminal, legal or even social risks. Finally, for victims of online abuse, it is necessary to challenge individualised narratives of risk (the 'self-managing' citizen), and the idea that targets should simply inure themselves from harm by being 'resilient', or independently seek retribution through the civil courts, rather than rely on institutions such as the police, the school or the family support to tackle the broader collective social issues that impact all of us.

I will now move on to discuss the relevant literature, theory and context for this research in Chapter One.

CHAPTER ONE: Context and Theory

Introduction

Risk is a dominant theme that emerges from existing literature in the area of the digital lives of children. Buckingham (2007a) highlights how discussions about childhood and new media appear to divide children into two opposing camps: those empowered and liberated by technology, i.e. 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), and those who are 'at risk', i.e. vulnerable and needing protection. In some ways, this reflects broader perspectives on childhood more generally, with claims that *every* child can be considered, to some extent, 'at-risk' (Lubeck and Garrett, 1990). Even more optimistic terms such as 'at-promise' still tend to construct children in terms of their potential as future adults, rather than recognizing them as complete beings, acting and existing in the present (Swadeneer and Lubeck, 1995; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). More broadly still, it has been claimed that risk has become a dominant feature of contemporary social life, with new risks emerging as technology develops, increasing pressure on citizen to 'self-manage' these as part of everyday life (Giddens, 1991; 1999; Beck, 1992; Rose, 1996a). This section will explore the major approaches to theorizing risk as a social construct and how this thesis aims to add to this body of work. It will also investigate how empirical findings can be used to challenge, support, develop or test the limits of risk theories, which have previously been criticized for lacking supporting evidence (Austen, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Burgess, 2006; Pilkington, 2007).

As an aspect of sociological enquiry, risk has grown in popularity over the last couple of decades. Contemporary understandings are mostly underpinned by an assumption that we have developed our abilities to predict, intervene with and actively shape future consequences, through action in the present (Arnoldi, 2009). In this sense, risks are conceptualised differently from dangers or hazards: they are primarily constructed as *man-made*; originating from human action rather than existing indiscriminately in nature (Beck, 1992; 1999; Lupton, 1999a). Similarly, the process of identifying, reflecting on and analysing risk can alter our perceptions and even behaviour. This means perceptions of risk are constantly shifting and evolving as new 'knowledge' emerges: The more we learn about the world, the more our eyes are opened to an increasing multitude of potential risks we were previously unaware of, and ways we ought to best respond to them. The 'sociology of risk' can loosely be grouped into three main perspectives, each of which will be investigated as part of

this research (Lupton, 1999a): The 'Cultural/Symbolic', the 'Risk Society' and the 'Governmentality' perspectives.

1.1 Risk and sociological theory

This section will provide an overview of the three major approaches to conceptualising risk as a social construct, and the ways in which these theories are relevant to the design and subject matter of this study.

A. Risk as symbolic/cultural (moral and emotional)

Emerging from the field of anthropology, the cultural/symbolic risk perspective stems from ideas about 'taboo' or 'sin'; something that upsets the social or cultural 'order' and is therefore forbidden (Douglas, 1992; 2002). Douglas claims constructs of risk are underpinned by *collective* (as opposed to individual) understandings, and conceptualizes risky people, places or actions within the theme of 'pollution', 'contamination' or that which breaches unwritten rules or boundaries. These ideas also appear to be underpinned by basic philosophical concepts of 'Self' and 'Other', with 'Self' relating not just to one's own body, but one's social group and social norms ('Other' being outside, beyond or on the fringes/borders). Constructions about risk are based on what is considered 'safe', 'clean' and 'contained' vs. that which is 'dangerous', 'dirty' or 'uncontained'. This cultural framing of risk goes beyond literal (or realist) interpretations, focusing more on the symbolic, and recognizing the active role that groups and social context play in creating meaning, associations and norms. This conceptualisation to some extent works in tandem with an interactionist approach to social research, which also asserts that meaning is symbolically and collectively constructed (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2010).

This approach distinguishes itself from the 'Risk Society' perspective through the consideration of the influence of so-called 'expert' risk knowledge; while the latter places an emphasis on hierarchies of knowledge, power, credibility and legitimacy on a societal/global/'macro' level, the symbolic/cultural perspective is more likely to stress the influential power of pop cultures, sub-culture, peer groups, friends and norms on a 'micro' social level. "People's behaviour must be seen not as based upon differential judgements of risk, but within the context of world views which may deviate greatly from that of the "expert" risk assessor" (Fox, 1999: 29). Much like social theories of deviance within fields of criminology, this allows for layers of potentially contradictory perspectives to be considered and analysed by a researcher

simultaneously: risky, taboo or deviant acts may be 'acknowledged' by participants in a broad, societal, 'macro' or abstract context (e.g. stealing is wrong; you shouldn't smoke), but also potentially normalised/neutralised within certain *specific micro social contexts* (e.g. we always sneak a couple of my Mum's cigarettes while she's out). In today's world, we are perhaps more likely to 'belong' to a variety of different social groups, especially online. Hence, the collective and cultural approach to risk may allow for effectively explaining more fluid 'perspectives' towards risk, rather conceptualising individualized, unique, fixed 'beliefs' or 'attitudes' towards risk.

The emphasis on risk as a collective construct makes risk an ideal subject for sociological study. Although empirical studies into risk perceptions sometimes use individuals as units of analysis (e.g. Austen, 2009), the symbolic/cultural perspective provides a rationale for using focus groups instead (e.g. Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). The positioning of risk as symbolic/cultural also suits ethnographic methodologies, with research exploring how meanings are created within specific social contexts. This approach may be criticised as being somewhat relativist, however, Douglas does acknowledge that 'real' dangers exist, but appears to be primarily interested in risk as a social, cultural, political construct (2002; Lupton, 1999). In this sense, discussions of theories such as 'social amplification', 'social audience labelling', and 'moral panics' can then be incorporated into discussions of risk as a symbolic construct, with moral and social values - and their accompanying *emotional* responses - arguably likely to have far greater impact upon perceptions than 'rational, scientific, objective, expert' knowledge (Lupton, 2013). One of the main challenges when considering the symbolic/cultural approach is the variety of social groups/organisations individuals may move between, and different roles played within those; this can mean the concept of a 'social order' and the very concept of 'self' may start to unravel in an online context.

<u>B. Risk as global, individualised and a dominant feature of contemporary life</u>

In 'The Risk Society' (1992), Beck argues that risk has become a defining feature of contemporary 'late modern' society, something Giddens also writes extensively about (1990; 1991; 1999). This idea is based on the claim that developments in technology, industry and science at the end of the 20th Century gave us opportunities to observe and manipulate the world around us in ways we never had before. Coupled with this was the slipping away of traditional social structures and institutions that had previously 'held' people in place (such as family, marriage, life-long employment and religion). Individuals are therefore constructed as needing to *decide on and shape*

their own futures. People's lives effectively become 'self-produced reflexive biographies' (Beck, 1992). Although this contemporary period of 'Reflexive Modernity' provides new forms of social freedom, he argues that individuals, and society as a whole, are forced to consider the potential outcomes of every new decision, which produces negative emotions. The concept of individuals as 'risk actors' or 'ideal citizens' implies that these choices have become a necessary and unavoidable responsibility (or burden) in almost every aspect of daily life, leading to an increase in "personal inadequacies, guilt, anxieties, conflicts and neuroses" (Beck, 1992: 100).

The concept of the individual 'freed' from social structures and hierarchies is also theorized as being somewhat of a myth, as Beck argues contemporary citizens have simply become dependent on *new* systems for meaning, such as "fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets" (131: 1992). There is a distinction made between individual powerlessness to manage a multitude of risks (particularly those with global, far-reaching and long-lasting consequences), and how we ontologically *experience* or construct risk: "intensification of individualism means that crises are perceived as individual shortcomings rather than the outcome of processes which are largely outside the control of individuals" (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997: 114). This is particularly interesting concept to consider in relation to 'responsibility' for risk management when it comes to children and new technology. Primary criticisms of this perspective are the lack of empirical evidence to support claims, over-emphasis on the global (macro) social context and under-theorizing of the social constructionist/critical sociology consideration of risk (e.g. explaining how and why certain behaviours, people, places etc. come to be defined as 'risky' and who benefits) (Pilkington, 2007; Austen, 2009).

Beck is primarily concerned with global risks, which may be limit the applicability of this approach to a study of young people and social media. He envisages contemporary risks as being far-reaching, with potential negative consequences being felt across time and space (1992). While this is relevant to global warming or nuclear weapons, it can sometimes be difficult to reconcile this with the concept of ordinary citizens' 'daily risk decisions' or the risks of social media misuse. That being said, this has relevance to studies of risk and the internet specifically, which is often constructed as both a 'boundary-less' (globally public) and 'timeless' (permanent) space (Beck, 1992). The previously mentioned 'morality tale' of Paris Brown seems to emphasise the idea that *everyone* will be able to see your social media mistakes, *forever*, which echoes Beck's conceptualisation of risk in late modernity. One criticism

of the Risk Society perspective is that it is potentially so broad that it perhaps glosses over consideration of how different contexts and cultures may dramatically alter our risk perceptions, with some assumptions of homogeneity within contemporary society underpinning this approach. This is further compounded by the lack of reflexivity in Giddens and Beck's work, as they often fail to examine their *own* underlying assumptions and values towards risk (Austen, 2009). If interpretations of the world (including those of sociologists) are inevitably shaped by an individual's place in it, there is a fundamental flaw in looking outward for sociological analysis without also looking inward (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

C. Risk, governmentality & the self-managing neoliberal citizen

The governmentality approach to theorizing risk asserts that there is power in being able to define and label what is 'risky', and so provides a useful framework for analysis relating to knowledge, discourse and dominant authorities when it comes to risk (Foucault, 1991; Rose 1996a; Trnka and Trundle, 2014). This approach is more concerned with *who* is able to construct what is 'risky', and likewise *who* by a disproportionately affected by this, as opposed to simply 'what' is risky and why. This makes it a useful companion for theories relating to 'claims-making' (Loseke, 1999) and labelling theory of deviance (Kitsuse, 1962; Lemert 1967; 1981; Becker, 1973; 1995; Taylor, Walter and Young, 1973). The underlying notion is that those with power retain their authoritative position through the construction and dissemination of 'knowledge' to continue to support and uphold existing power structures in society (Foucault, 1991). This means risk is conceptualized as a technique of governance and control ('governmentality'): essentially citizens internalize dominant discourses about risk, which influence their thoughts and behaviour (thereby removing the need for governments to actively 'manage' them in a demonstrable sense). The citizen is forced to *self-manage*, as Lianos and Douglas explain (2000: 261), "in Foucault's conception, punishment is not retributive or retaliatory, but the cultural reconstruction of the subject."

In some ways, the 'self-monitoring' or 'self-governing' individual somewhat parallels Beck (1992) and Giddens' (1991) concept of the 'ideal citizen' or the 'rational, responsible risk actor', yet with the former perhaps leaning towards a more critical social constructionist approach to the concept of risk. Power inequalities are central to the governmentality perspective, which (in relation to risk) are characterized by critiques of risk 'experts' versus those who are 'at-risk' or 'risky'. Generally speaking, risk 'experts' perform an important role in constructing, disseminating and

perpetuating risk discourses, and/or suggesting interventions to effectively manage risk, often with benefits for themselves (economic, social, etc.[5]) Groups or individuals labelled 'risky' or 'at-risk' are constructed as deviating from 'acceptable' risk-managing behaviours and therefore potentially 'justifiably' subjected to interventions (i.e. monitoring, regulation and control), for society's - and/or their own - benefit. Knowledge is power and functions as a form of social control. This is perhaps a somewhat over-simplified distillation of what is in reality a far more complex series of processes, but provides a useful overlap with labeling theory of deviance and critical criminology perspectives, interested primarily in *who has power to apply labels* and to whom those labels are applied (Becker, 1963; 1976; Taylor et al 1973; See also: 'claims-making'/'claims-makers' in relation to social problems; Loseke, 1947/2003; 1999).

Although this concept provides a useful critical lens through which to analyze and evaluate dominant risk discourse or risk narratives, at times it fails to adequately explain how and why certain risks come to be described and defined as such (beyond simply benefiting in power and upholding existing structures). Where these ideas are perhaps most useful are in relation to discussion of risk, responsibilisation and neo-liberalism (Giddens, 1991; 1999; Gordon, 1991; Bauman, 1992; Rose, 1996a; Kelly, 2001; Powell and Edwards, 2003). Broadly speaking neo-liberalism refers to ideals or practices that may include "a shrinking state mandate, deregulation and privatisation, a faith in markets to govern social life, and an increased emphasis on personal choice and freedom" (Trnka and Trundle, 2014: 86). The 'responsibilisation' of citizens is therefore conceived as a technique of neo-liberal governments, particularly in relation to crime or health risks (Lupton, 2013). Theories of governmentality and responsibilisation can be utilised when exploring how narratives about risk (whether from governments, parents, teachers, peers or the media) may be interpreted and internalized by young participants and influence their perspectives. Equally, discussion of ways to manage or minimize digital risks – particularly any discourses emphasizing 'responsibilisation', 'resilience' or 'blame'- can then be analysed through a critical lens to question who is empowered or disempowered by this.

[5] The irony is not lost here that this is also the case for many academics and researchers.

1.2 Social context for the research: Children and Digital risks

> "The meaning of childhood is subject to a constant process of struggle and negotiation, both in public discourse (for example, in the media, in the academy or in social policy) and in interpersonal relationships, among peers and in the family." (Buckingham, 2000: 6)

In the opening to her Ted Talk in 2015, Sonia Livingstone claims, "Childhood is not what it used to be", and she is right. It has been estimated that 99% of 16 – 24 year olds in the UK are regular Internet users, and roughly three quarters of 12-15 have their own social media profile (ONS, 2015; Ofcom, 2017). This is supported by longitudinal data gathered over several years, which shows smartphone and internet-enabled device ownership among secondary school pupils is close to 100% in some areas of the U.K. (Powell-Jones, 2018).

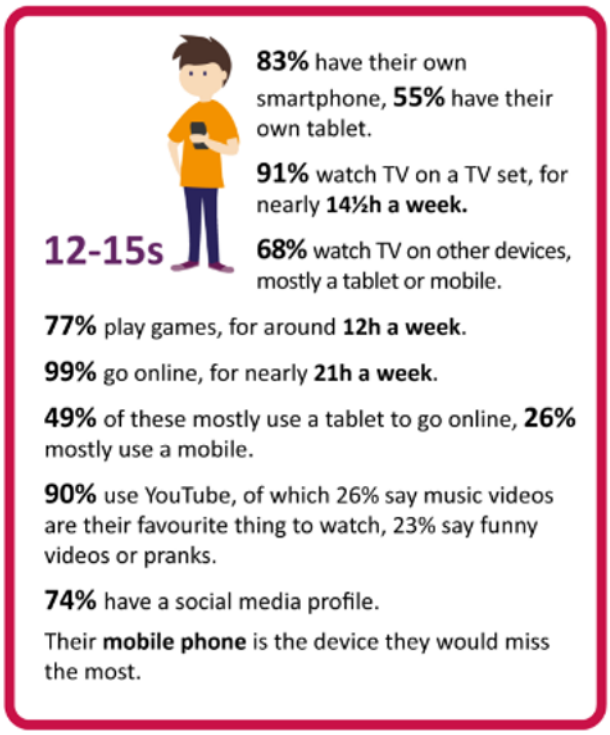

Fig. A: Ofcom (2017: 2) Media Lives by age: A snapshot

Young people are thought to be spending significantly more time online than adults and it is argued that, for many, digital forms of communication have become an integral part of social life, particularly as mobile technologies allow for 27/4 communication 'on the go' (Peter, Valkenburg & Schouten, 2006; Livingstone, 2009; boyd[6], 2014; Shariff, 2015). While some research hails the potential opportunities this presents for future generations, much of the academic, media and policy attention has focused primarily on risks to children in this new, 'digital age' (Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu and MacFadden, 2011; Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski and Zimmerman, 2013; Munthe and Persson de Fine Licht, 2014; Bird, Taylor and Kraft, 2012; Strom et al, 2011; Ringrose et al, 2012).

[6] Deliberately lowercase. See: http://www.danah.org/

A vast amount of research has attempted to broadly investigate and map *how* children are using digital media, with a dearth of quantitative survey data available on youth technology habits and attitudes (e.g. Ofcom, 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2017; ONS, 2015; McAfee, 2012; 2014; Lenhart, 2015). Notably, Ofcom's report into children and media usage not only investigates the scale of children's use of digital technologies (see: Fig. A), but also the level of parental concern about this. Generally speaking, 'concern' seems to be much higher in relation to children's use of *the Internet* than uses of other media, such as watching television, gaming or using their mobile phone (49% of parents for 12-15 year olds reported being 'very/fairly concerned' about their child's online activities specifically) (Ofcom, 2017: 190). Parents were also questioned about their employment of online safety strategies, such as 'content filters'; not only simply whether or not they used them, but if they didn't, *why* they didn't (Ofcom, 2017: 245). Research such as this demonstrates the extent to which social constructions of risk (and therefore risk management) are often inextricably intertwined with 'objective' statistical data about children's media use.

Research and reports into children's media use can provide valuable commercial and political insights, and therefore may focus risk concerns around particular phenomena (i.e. certain platforms or apps, or certain behaviours, such as 'sexting' or 'happy-slapping'[7]), rather than their social, cultural and political contexts. This tends to result in findings that are somewhat a-theoretical or overlook cultural influences on perceptions of the behaviour. Additionally, the recommendations of such research tend to lean towards technological solutions (e.g. promoting blocking, filtering or monitoring software for parents) or individualised solutions (e.g. responisbilising young people to be mindful, and resist harmful or addictive aspects of new technology) ('Growing Up Digital', 2017; 'Digital 5 A Day', 2017; ThinkUKnow.co.uk).

Although both risk and opportunity increase the more time a child spends online (Livingstone, Olafsson and Staksrud, 2011: 142), research strongly indicates that risk factors for negative experiences online, such as cyberbullying, tend to be *social,* rather than technological (Navarro, Yubero and Larranaga, 2015; Schoffstall and Cohen, 2011). Young people with low social status or marginalized position are more likely to be victimized online, although it is not clear whether this relationship is correlational or causal (Shariff, 2009; 2015; Cassidy, Jackson and Brown, 2009; Rice, Petering, Rhoades, Winetrobe, Goldbach, Plant, Montoya and Kordic, 2015). Equally,

[7] 'Happy slapping' is a term for "recording a physical assault on an unsuspecting victim on a camera-enabled phone for Internet upload" (Palasinski, 2013: 1909)

young people's use of technology is not universal and unanimous: 'digital divides' means that children's experiences can be hugely diverse, varying according to access to resources (be they technological or educational), social skills, confidence and abilities, or the size, shape and culture of their existing social networks (Buckingham, 2007a). It's claimed the technology market does not necessarily design 'with children in mind' and in some cases may even exploit them or leave them vulnerable ('Digital Childhood', 2017; Livingstone, 2015).

What actually is considered a 'risk' when it comes to young people online also varies widely. Threats are still often primarily considered in terms of 'stranger danger'; specifically, predatory adults having unsupervised contact with children via their computers and smartphones (Savirimuthu, 2012). This has become a cultural and media fixation too, with TV dramas such as Channel 4's 'Cyberbully' – the story of a girl being 'sexploited' by an anonymous perpetrator via her laptop - being described as "topical", "potent" and "socially-useful television" by the press (Monaghan, 2015). Children themselves also highlight this as being a major concern (Ofcom, 2014a). A side effect of this construction is that what is considered 'risky online behaviour' for children has been expanded to include everything from talking to people they do not know, to sharing photos, or publishing any personal information, despite this being encouraged by social networking sites and normalized by peers (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Ybarra, 2008; Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2007; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Shariff, 2015).

It is not uncommon for researchers to begin journal articles without clearly explaining *why* they've identified certain behaviour as 'risky' in the first place, failing to reflect on how their own perspectives can influence research design (and, ultimately, findings). Deschamps and McNutt (2016) claim that we still lack a standardized definition of 'cyberbullying', despite the subject being the focus of a vast number of empirical studies. Over the past decade, as peer-to-peer digital victimization fell more under the spotlight, academic studies focused more on cultural influences affecting behaviour (e.g. Salter, 2017; Shariff, 2015; Marwick, 2015; Ringrose et al, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Mishna et al, 2011), while the media continues to focus upon the technology itself. There are several examples in the British press of high profile teenage suicides being linked to the *specific websites* where their victimization occurred (e.g. BBC News, 2013; Bryne, 2013; Tozer, 2013), while failing to discuss the broader and more distressing context that suicide generally remains the leading cause of death among those aged 5-19 (Public Health England, 2017). More recently,

risk concerns have expanded to include the collection and use of children's private data and the impact of 'screen time' on children's physical and mental health[8]. New studies on children's use of digital media must be careful to avoid contributing to the construction of technology as *inherently* risky, rather than a social tool with particular 'affordances' and norms, as this may perpetuate a sense of moral necessity on the part of responsible adults to monitor, manage and ultimately restrict children's digital lives.

The diversity of what can be considered 'risky' online drives a need to allow young people's perspectives to lead to the conversation. The largest qualitative study into children, risk and the Internet is undoubtedly the EU Kids Online project[9] (Hasbrink, Livingstone, Haddon and Olafsson, 2009; Livingston and Haddon, 2009). Initiated in 2006, the project's youth-led approach enabled child participants to describe and define *for themselves* what they felt was problematic or harmful online. Responses were gathered from roughly 20,000 children across Europe, in 21 different languages, to the open-ended question "What about the Internet would bother children your age?" Using native speakers, answers were coded into 40 different categories; broadly classified as 'Content' risks (child as the recipient), 'Contact' risks (child as the participant) and 'Conduct' risks (child as the actor) (see fig. B). Follow up findings from further phases of this project suggest that 'nasty' or 'hateful' messages may be becoming more of a concern to children than meeting strangers or receiving sexual messages, compared with the previous findings (fig. C).

	Commercial	**Aggressive**	**Sexual**	**Values**
Content - *child as recipient*	Advertising, spam, sponsorship	Violent/ hateful content	Pornographic or unwelcome sexual content	Racism, biased or misleading info/ advice (e.g. drugs)
Contact - *child as participant*	Tracking/ harvesting personal info	Being bullied, stalked or harassed	Meeting strangers, being groomed	Self-harm, unwelcome persuasion
Conduct - *child as actor*	Gambling, hacking, illegal downloads	Bullying or harassing another	Creating and uploading porn material	Providing advice e.g. suicide/ pro-anorexic chat

Fig. B: A classification of online risks to children (Hasebrink et al, 2009: 8)

[8] For a comprehensive overview, see the UK Safer Internet Centre's 'Research Highlight Series': https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/research/research-highlight-series

[9] The EU Kids Online I, II, III and IV project details (2006-18) can be found online: http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/eu-kids-online/about

Fig. C: 'How do children engage with the Internet?' TedX Talk (Livingstone, 2015)

Also vitally important are the growing number of studies that utilize face-to-face, peer-group, youth-led, qualitative methods to understand youth constructs and definitions of risk. These include danah boyd's (2014) rich ethnographic research on teenagers and social media, based on interviews and participant observation of youth culture in the United States over five years. Her immersive, empirical and vast qualitative research (conducted across various states, cultures, races, classes, age groups and socio-economic backgrounds) has allowed for a variety of 'risky' issues (digital abuse, flirting and sexual communication, privacy breaches etc.) to be explored and examined within particular contexts and with clarification and input from young people. Other notable studies include Shaheen Shariff's (2015) 'Defining the Line' project in Canada, where young people were asked in groups to respond to vignettes providing examples of various behaviours, and Michael Salter's (2017) 'Crime, Justice and Social Media', also based upon focus group discussion with young people in Australia about how they defined and navigated a range of digital social issues, including distribution of indecent images among peers. More recently in the UK, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) undertook a year-long ethnographic study of one class of peers (28 children, aged 13-14), observing and interviewing them at school, at home and in the community to investigate how they embedded uses of digital media into their everyday lives. The benefits and influences of these kinds of studies on the approach and design of this research will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2 (Methods.)

When it comes to harmful or problematic digital interaction, young people's perspectives matter, primarily because they can be potential recipients, participants and/or actors when it comes to online behaviour. The EU Kids Online classifications mean that 'bullying and harassment' (as a social phenomenon) could be explored as a potential 'Content', 'Contact' *and/or* 'Conduct' risk (fig. B: Hasebrink et al, 2009). Distinctions between participant, recipient and actor can be blurred by the highly interactive nature of social media platforms. Some researchers have called for an end to the false dichotomy of 'victim/bully' altogether, highlighting that those who bully others online are highly likely to have been victimised themselves (Shariff, 2015;

Thomas, Connor and Scott, 2015). This is similar to the 'victim/offender' dichotomy within fields of criminology, where complex notions of agency, intention and circumstances impact assessments of 'culpability', especially when it comes to children and young people (Case and Haines, 2015; Farringdon, Loeber and Howell, 2012). What is clear from the existing research is that risk and responsibility, like notions of norms and deviance, are ever-shifting concepts. This justifies the need for research to take into consideration young people's *perspectives* of these broad constructs, and not simply attempt to quantify problematic behaviour as if it were randomly occurring phenomena or the result of individual pathology.

Research also shows that perspectives on what is 'acceptable' to do or say online also differ, not only between peers, but notably also between generations (Ofcom, 2013; 2014b; 2015; 2017; Marwick and boyd, 2014a; 2014b; Talwar, Gomez-Garibello and Shariff, 2014; Smahel and Wright, 2014). Broad terms such as 'cyberbullying' tend not to reflect the full spectrum of potentially harmful and less harmful/harmless behaviours (Shariff, 2015; Deschamps and McNutt, 2016). Olweus's (2012) widely cited definition insists that conduct must include repetition over time, intention to harm, and an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and victim. This would, however, exclude an array of other harmful - potentially criminal – behaviours if they were single incidents, such as hate speech, image-based sexual abuse, or 'doxxing'[10] (Pyzalski, 2012; Antijoule, 2013; Copsey, Dack, Littler and Feldman, 2013; McGlynn, 2017; Salter, 2017). Sociological, psychological and educational research can overlook relevant legal or criminal framework for what constitutes misuse of communication technologies, despite alleged attempts to 'crack down' on digital offences, at a legislative level and a practical implementation level (CPS, 2018; 2014b; 2015; 2017b; Cheshire, 2014.)

Assumptions about risk often incorporate assumptions about harm, yet not all risks result in harm (Livingstone, 2009; Livingstone and Smith, 2014). The misuse of digital technology is at times discussed as though it were a new and problematic "youth epidemic" (Cesaroni et al, 2012: 208). Yet some research suggests that only a small minority of young people are victimized online, and some of those will remain relatively unaffected by the experience (Purdy and York, 2016; Hase, Goldber, Smith, Stuck and Campain, 2015; Lilley, Ball and Vernon, 2014; Bauman, 2013; Parris,

[10] 'Doxxing' is defined as 'making [publicly] available personal information, for example a home address or bank details' as part of a campaign of encouraging harassment of a targeted individual. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), pledged to include this in the CPS updated guidelines for prosecuting social media enabled offences (Saunders, 2016).

Varjas, Meyers, and Cutts, 2012; Livingstone, Haddon et al, 2011). Research into 'sexting' has also been criticized for failing to acknowledge positive social drivers as a motivation for the practice, relying on an automatic 'framework of harm' (Gabriel, 2014). It is vital that researchers critically interrogate their assumptions of definitions of 'risky' or deviant online behaviour prior to designing research, and are transparent about where these definitions are drawn from. This also further justifies a social constructionist approach to studying digital behaviour, as certain digital risks to children may be socially amplified, while others overlooked, downplayed, or misunderstood in terms how they are framed (Kasperson, Ren, Slovic, Brown, Emel, Goble, Kasperson and Ratick, 1988; Kasperson, Kasperson, Pidgeon and Slovic, 2003; Kasperson and Kasperson, 2005).

The kinds of digital technology young people use, and how they use them, are changing all the time. But in the study of potential 'risks', we must be careful not to overlook deeper underlying social problems, which are arguably more universal and persistent than the technology that enables them to be expressed. The Pew Internet Center (2018) gained much media attention when it proclaimed teenagers were leaving Facebook en mass, preferring apps like YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram instead (Solon, 2018). The same study also highlights that "bullying, people being mean, and spreading rumors" were the top concerns among those who felt that social media mostly has a negative effect (2018: 19). Social research can be of even more value when it goes beyond revelation of this kind of statistical data to interrogating potential perspectives and influences for behaviour (essentially, asking 'why' as much as 'what/how' young people use technology). We must remember that technology is designed by people, most often for economic gain in response to a perceived market demand, and is therefore not 'neutral'. Salter (2017) and Livingstone (2009; 2015), among others, continually reinforce the argument that various 'affordances' offered by new technology, or the architectural design of digital social spaces, have great power to actively shape and influence young people's behaviour while using them.

Previous studies have also highlighted this Facebook 'exodus' of teenagers, and partly blamed this on the behaviour of adults, specifically their 'immigration' onto the site: "You just can't be young and free if you know your parents can access your every indiscretion" (Miller, 2013). Similarly, boyd (2014) argues it is not only the technology market that drives young people online, but parents themselves, many of whose safety concerns result in restricting their children's offline movements. Parental

safety fears combined with state cuts to public services in the UK are likely two of the biggest contributors to restrictions on young people's free access to *physical* spaces with social, cultural and leisure opportunities (Darbyshire, 2007; Trnka and Trundle, 2014). This raises questions about how broader socio-cultural influences may be driving young people toward the digital sphere in order to experience public participation and social interaction. It has also been claimed fears over new technologies could represent parental fears over rapid changes (be they occurring in society more generally, and/or specific changes they see in their children as they progress towards adulthood) (Livingstone, 2009; boyd, 2014). Regardless of whether the risks of new media are considered as objective threats, randomly occurring social phenomena, or socially constructed, the management of those risks (responsibility) has been the focus of much debate.

There has been a vast amount of discussion, and disagreement, over who ought to be taking responsibility for online and digital risks to children on a local, national and international level. This section will attempt to provide a brief overview of the criminal, legal, educational and media responses to the issues surrounding young people and the misuse of social media, outlining the social context for this research.

A. The Criminal Justice System, legal and policing responses

The legal and criminal considerations surrounding youth misuse of digital technology are often overlooked by academic research. Debates on *whether* cyberbullying ought to be criminalized seem to appear to overlook the fact that, to some extent, it already is (Campbell and Zavrsnik, 2013). Many of the kinds of 'cyberbullying' behaviours investigated by social research are potentially already unlawful in England and Wales under existing legislation (See fig. D).

Behaviour	**Relevant legislation (CPS)**
Threats, threatening, harassing, stalking or controlling/coercive behaviour	• S16 Offences Against the Person Act 1861 • S2 or 4 Protection from Harassment Act 1997 • S1 Malicious Communications Act • S127 Communications Act 2003 • S76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015
Disclosing private/sexual indecent images or video	• S33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015

Behaviour	Relevant legislation (CPS)
Making/possessing sharing indecent images of under-18s	• S1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 (if under-18) • S160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (if under 18)
Grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or false communications	• S1 Malicious Communications Act 1988 • S127 of the Communications Act 2003
Publishing material to stir up hatred/ hate crimes/ aggravated offences on the basis of Race, Religion or Sexual Orientation	• S28-32 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 • S19-29 Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 • 3A of the Public Order Act 1986
Fig. D: Summary of relevant legislation used to prosecute cases involving communications sent via social media in England and Wales (CPS, 2018)	

Laws relating to hate speech, malicious or offensive communications, abuse and threats are already used to investigate and prosecute social media offenders in the U.K. as well as Canada and the U.S., although these come with their own challenges (Cesaroni et al, 2012: 208; El Asam and Samara, 2016). Freedom of Information (FOI) requests have revealed the number of alleged online offences being reported to police in the U.K. is fairly significant (more than 16,000 in a year), as are the number of children being investigated by police for social media related offences (more than 2,000 over three years) (Cheshire, 2014; Evans, 2015). Not only that, but figures from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) show the number of criminal convictions for communications offences reportedly increased to the equivalent of five per day in 2014, with 694 people convicted and 155 jailed in total (Telegraph, 2015). A decade earlier, the number of people given a custodial sentence for these kinds of offences in the U.K. was just reportedly just seven (ibid).

These changing rates have been accompanied by changes in the law, due to concern over whether existing legislation was sufficient for the digital age. New guidelines on prosecuting criminal cases involving social media were introduced in 2014 and then updated in 2018 after consultation (CPS, 2018). Clause 27 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 increased the maximum sentence for communications offences to

two years (originally six months) (Parliament.co.uk, 2014). Shariff (2015) notes risk that laws designed to protect children may in some cases be used incorrectly to punish them, particularly in relation to 'sexting' offences in North America. Similar indications of a more punitive implementation of the law have been made here in the U.K., despite police now having the option to record incidents without taking formal action if not considered in the public interest to do so (Nottingham Post, 2014; BBC News, 2017a; McManus and Almond, 2018). These changes constitute an important and relevant aspect of the context for this research. The figures suggest that there has been a shift, either in terms of the prevalence of these offences, or the punitive measures being taken against them by the justice system, or both.

It may be argued that the criminal and legal aspects of social media misuse do not merit examination as it would be unlikely for under-18s to fit the requirement of 'pubic interest' to proceed with prosecution. However, criminalization remains a risk for young people in England and Wales, as the age of responsibility is just ten years old (Gov.co.uk, 2014; Jewkes, 2011; Muncie, 2009; 2014). Even if criminal action is considered inappropriate, the risk management approach of the police is nonetheless to record incidents of image-sharing by young people, which has raised concern over whether this will deter young victims of so-called 'revenge porn' from reporting incidents or seeking help (McManus and Almond, 2018). Some argue that the topic of youth misuse of digital media should be examined using more traditional youth justice or criminological frameworks (Cesaroni et al, 2012), while others claim broader cultural norms and existing power structures must also be interrogated, along with the legal aspects (Salter, 2017; Shariff, 2015). It is important to be wary of common assumptions that only parents or teachers will have responsibility to deal with negative consequences of cyber misuse: the police and the courts play a key role too. Just as police may feel their role managing cyber misuse among young people makes them more akin to a parent (e.g. Broll and Huey, 2015), it may be that school staff feel they are increasingly positioned as responsible for monitoring and management young 'potential offenders', akin to the police (Garland, 1997).

B. School and Education responses

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a long history within schools, having been compulsory since the Education Reform Act 1988. Also important to note is the Education and Inspection Act 2006, which outlines schools' legal responsibilities to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for children, even off-site or outside of school hours (El Asam and Samara, 2016). E-safety has been

compulsory since 2009, following on from The Byron review (2008) and the creation of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS). Around the same time the Child Exploitation and Online Protection command (CEOP), part of the UK National Crime Agency, were given responsibility to provide Internet safety education in schools. In 2012, the schools watchdog (Ofsted) issued new guidelines on e-safety, warning that schools will specifically be assessed on how well pupils and staff are educated and equipped to deal with internet-related issues (MacKenzie, 2012). For those attempting to reduce risks and maximize opportunities involving new technology for young people, schools seem the most obvious target for innovation and interventions. However, as Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016: 261) highlight, England has perhaps more than any other country in the developed world been "a national crucible for continuous, persistent educational reform for the past 25 years", which, naturally, creates additional challenges.

Despite a multitude of sources of support and advice, schools admit continuing to struggle with youth digital issues, be they related to safety, technology, best practice, policy, law or ethics (Powell-Jones, 2018). A chorus of multiple expert voices, combined with almost complete autonomy over *how* subjects like ICT, e-safety and citizenship are taught within schools, plus a vast wealth of at times conflicting information, has perhaps generated greater inconsistency and insecurity, leading to calls for greater standardization of training (Hasebrink et al, 2009). There are a number of NGOs, government initiatives, charities and not-for-profit organizations working to address the issue of risks to children online (such as the European NGO Alliance for Child Safety; The Internet Watch Foundation, the UK Safer Internet Centre, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, the London Grid for Learning and the NSPCC-run NetAware, to name just a few). These are recommended 'sources of support' for teachers, yet with no standardized curriculum, this can reinforce somewhat the individualization of risk management (Kelly, 2001). While formal ICT education tends to focus on developing practical or technical skills for employability (with coding, hacking and programming classes now standard on some curriculums), there is perhaps less consideration of the legal, criminal, ethical or human rights issues involved in digital interaction within schools (Shariff, 2015; Koutropoulos, 2011). Studies suggest students' online behaviour impacts their teacher's perceptions of risk, just as perceptions of a teacher's ability to effectively intervene may also influence digitally abusive behaviour among students (Eden, Heiman and Olnick-Shemesh, 2013; Elledge, Williford, Boulton, DePaolis, Little and Salmivalli, 2013).

In terms of responsibility, the pressure on schools to protect students can lead to more potential risks developing. Arguably, schools are being held more accountable than ever for tackling youth digital issues, with parents, police and the press increasingly looking to teachers to manage those risks. One controversial example is the Ofsted grading of a Tower Hamlets school 'inadequate' partly due to links to "extremist material" on the social media accounts of a few of their sixth formers (Weale and Adams, 2015). The positioning of the school as the authority responsible for managing - even policing - young citizens' digital lives is becoming more common, with school social media surveillance technology already utilised in some U.S. schools (Garland, 1997; Griffin, 2015). This creates an alternative kind of risk for children: potential encroachment on their rights and freedoms. Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 covers the right to privacy and private communications, Article 10 HRA, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to access digital opportunities is part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but these are not often mentioned in school policies or discussed in classrooms as part of PSHE or digital citizenship. As boyd (2014) points out, tracking every teen's move online may be considered a swift and simple way to manage risk, but poses a multitude of ethical concerns with regard to children's rights.

C. Technological responses

It is also important to consider youth perspectives and behaviour within the context of new and emerging technological affordances. What may be considered the 'norm' for young people in terms of digital interaction is constantly shifting. Shariff (2015:77) claims certain apps "thrive *because* they indirectly encourage or enable people to take greater risks with online postings" (my emphasis). This is echoed by Ofcom research (2014a: 6) that claims, "Some intrinsic aspects of the online environment served to *facilitate* risk-taking among teenagers" (my emphasis). At the same time technology companies are also rolling out new products to soothe parental fears about their child's 'risky' digital activities, responding to calls for more filters, blocking and restrictions, which Buckingham (2007: 94) attributes to 'moral panics'. Another development is the rise in the number of 'parenting apps' on offer, such as 'TeenSafe', which allow adults to essentially 'spy' on their children's cyber activities (BBC News, 2015b; YourSphere, 2014). While arguments based on technological determinism may be difficult to justify, it is also dangerous to assume technology and the free market are somehow neutral in relation to human behaviours, norms and perceptions. Additionally, much of the existing empirical research stresses how

important interrogating existing power structures are to understanding abusive or risk-taking behaviour exhibited online (Salter, 2017; Shariff, 2015; Ringrose et al, 2012).

Concerns about technology therefore also seem to provide a useful mask for fears about childhood more generally. It is difficult to separate parents' fearful discussion of new behaviours or apps, from fears about change or a lack of control over their children. Risks to young people online often incorporate a theme of adult exclusion or 'adult-free zones' (boyd, 2014; Shariff, 2015). Comparisons have even been made between social networking sites and Golding's island in 'Lord of the Flies', with the suggestion that without adult supervision children will abandon civilized social rules and destroy each other (Strom et al 2011; Shariff, 2015). Safety fears have led to some parents becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of children interacting with the offline world without adult supervision, something researchers argue is the same when it comes to monitoring children's activities online (boyd 2014; Livingstone, 2009). This is often described as a 'protectionist' approach to youth and childhood, highly criticized by authors such as Kitzinger (1988) and Barnard-Wills (2012).

D. Media and the Press

Over the last year or so, the U.K. media have engaged in reporting on a series of news stories relating to technology 'scandals', from hacking/information security breaches, to the collection and use of customers' private data, to calls to do more to tackle extremism, misogyny, hate crime etc. in the wake of tragedies. It may be that this, over time, has the potential to create change among the companies who design and facilitate social media platforms to take further responsibility for managing digital in future. However, as per the media scandal model, press coverage has tended to result in the 'public inquiry' outcome (i.e. technology bosses called to answer questions in parliament), although this has been met with a certain continuing amount of disregard (Greer and McLaughlin, 2016; BBC News, 2018). While some campaigns aimed at placing greater responsibility on private companies have been successful (such as clauses for greater protection of children's information within the new Data Protection Act 2018), mainstream press coverage tends to continue to focus on individuals' fight for justice (such as Katie's Price's petition to change to law to protect her son from cyberbullies), perhaps further emphasizing a narrative of *individualised* risk management solutions (Cresci, 2017; Children's Commissioner's Office, 2017; Kelly, 2001).

The media can in itself present a risk to young people publishing content online. Children are rarely aware of civil risks in a digital context (e.g. accusations of defamation privacy or copyright breaches), which may result in legal action from fellow users or copyright owners (Shariff, 2008; 2015; Ofcom, 2014a). In addition, content posted online may carry risks to reputation, employability or other social and emotional consequences if shared widely among the public. Public shaming as a result of social media 'fails' can lead to serious, long-term harm, particularly if exacerbated by mainstream press coverage (Ronson, 2015). Paris Brown is a perfect example of this: Selected as the UK's first Youth Police and Crime Commissioner, she epitomizes the risks teenagers may face from the press, as opposed to the police. A selection of controversial comments she had made on her old Twitter account (which she'd used since she was 12) were published by a national newspaper shortly after she was announced as the winning candidate for the new role. After intense public, media and political scrutiny, she was forced to step down, just days after first stepping into the spotlight and aged just 17 (Myers, 2013).

Stories like Paris Brown's highlight the challenges in trying to define risk in relation to digital content. The scope for what can be considered risky suddenly becomes impossibly broad, if negative judgments from future potential employers, potential partners, family, the press and the public are all considered. Yet, research also highlights that *not* participating in digital technologies also carry risks for children, such as developing inferior technical skills, becoming more social isolated and missing out on opportunities to learn or be creative (Livingstone, 2009; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2017). The potential risks to reputation inevitably increases depending on how important or public an individual becomes, meaning contemporary risk judgments are made in the context of a multitude of future unknowns. The shadow of potential negative consequences in the future can hang darkly over enjoyable immersion in the present, which is one reason why campaigns such as '5Rights' (formerly 'iRights') propose young people be given the right to wipe their online digital history when they reach 18 (5Rights, 2018; Singh, 2015).

When turning a critical eye to existing cyberbullying research, it can be argued that the focus on 'new' behaviours and technologies is also masking broader, underlying, social problems surrounding bullying and abuse (e.g. prejudice, discrimination and inequality). Quoting Cohen's work on 'Moral Panics', it is claimed that cyberbullying, like many moral panics, "are a consequence of public apprehensions about real, but poorly understood strains and tensions in society… a long existing phenomenon that

suddenly appears in the limelight" (Cesaroni et al., 2012: 200). There is an advocated need to recognize that not all risks are harmful, and that children's desires to explore the online world independently from adults should not only be encouraged, but protected as a legal right (Livingstone and Bulger, 2014). Some empirical research suggests the harm of cyber bullying may be mostly short-term and only affecting a minority of children, or that what may appear to be harmful to outsiders can potentially be nothing more than performative 'drama' when witnessed through the eyes of young people (e.g. Parris, et al., 2012; Lilley et al, 2014; Marwick and boyd, 2014b). This emphasizes further the need for qualitative, empirical research with young participants to ensure that their perspectives are being incorporated into the 'feedback loop' of social reactions and responses, within law, government, education, technology companies and the media.

1.3 Key themes from existing research and contributions to knowledge

In this section, I will attempt to provide an overview of the key themes within existing studies in perceptions of risk, including studies exploring youth perspectives and those specifically related to digital risks, and how my research might be able to contribute to knowledge in this area.

A. Risks: 'them', 'us' and 'me'

The first step to understanding perceptions of risk is to empirically investigate 'what' is considered risky. When Lupton and Tulloch (2002) undertook focus group research into Australian's perceptions of risk, participants were asked about risk in general (abstract), risk specifically in relation to them (individualized) and risk to Australia as a whole (societal). Although generalizations cannot be made from this study (the snowball sample consisted of existing social networks and is neither diverse nor representative), the open-questioning approach and the depth of qualitative data provides useful insights into the social construction of risk and how empirical data can support sociological theories of risk. Examples of individual risks tended to comprise of criminal activity or activity with a chance of physical harm (e.g. taking drugs, extreme sports etc.). Risks to Australians generally, on the other hand, comprised of more socio-economic or political risks, such as racism, social injustice or inequality. Social or emotional risk on an individual level, such as "leaving established social networks" or "family" were occasionally mentioned (ibid: 323), but the findings suggest that risk is perceived differently when considered as affecting individuals, as opposed to the collective.

There is a clear distinction here between what could be referred to as risk 'affecting me' versus risk 'affecting others/us all'. Large-scale, far-reaching risks such as climate change or nuclear disasters are difficult to conceptualise as immediate risks to individuals *personally* (Beck, 1992). When referencing a traffic hot spot near his home, Beck (1997:108) highlights a sign reading: 'You are not *in* the bottleneck, you *are* the bottleneck'. In other words, we may be aware of wider, globalized risks, but may not consider it a direct threat to us as individuals. One participant highlighted her fear that Australia was "becoming more insular and less liberal, in the inclusive and democratic sense of liberal" and there is a sense of this risk being somehow more distant or intangible than the more individual or localized examples of risk stated by participants (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002: 329). For this reason, theoretically and methodologically, it is important to make clear any distinction between asking participants about risk 'in general' or to another, versus risk to them specifically, as this could affect their responses (Gabriel, 2014). This also raises questions in terms of how blame or *responsibility* for these risks may be perceived. This research will be focusing upon risks to the sender of different example messages, attempting to focus participants upon specific risks (publishing online material), but to an imagined individual rather than themselves. There will be opportunity for open focus group discussion about more generalised risks (e.g. online privacy, prejudice, etc.) and whether these are constructed differently to individualised risks.

Empirical studies into risk perceptions tend to focus on risks that are individualized, tangible and as directly or immediately affecting the participant. These are often characterized as having a potential outcome of death, physical injury, health problems or criminal penalties (e.g. smoking, drug-taking, sexual promiscuity, stealing, speeding, skydiving etc.) (Lyng, 1990; Pilkington, 2007; Austen, 2009). This is perhaps because social, emotional, political or global risks are perhaps more difficult to define or quantify. It may be that the individual is seen as carrying the risk of any potential harm, rather than society, or that it is simply more likely to be viewed as within participants control to manage these risks. Further research is needed to explore how these different levels of risk – and whom they affect - may be socially constructed. It would be interesting to understand more about how social risks (e.g. racism, homophobia, sexism) may be framed as risks to the self, risks to 'others', or broader risks to 'us all' and how responsibility for risk management may be shaped as result of this. This study will include stimuli material that includes inciting hatred against particular identity groups, so will provide an opportunity to explore how these are viewed as a risk to an individual (sender) as well as society more broadly.

B. Emotions, trust and friendship

Social context plays a crucial role in how we define risk. While Beck (1992), Giddens (1991) and Bauman (1992; 2005) discuss the idea of risk as becoming more individualized (or at least being experienced in that way), empirical studies tend to support Douglas' (1992; 2002) theory of risk as socially and culturally situated. Pilkington's (2007) research into youth drug taking is a clear example of this. Using an ethnographic approach, participant observation notes were made of the interactions within different social groups of teenagers (aged 14-19), over a six-week period and analyzed in conjunction with questionnaire results and interviews. Although the sample size was small and fairly homogenous, the findings suggest that the context and *the company* within which risk perceptions arise are of the utmost importance. Emotional needs, trust, intimacy and friendship were described as primary influences in the decision of whether or not to take drugs among young participants. The conclusion stresses that we must be careful not to place too much emphasis on the influence of 'expert' risk knowledge, arguing that peers and popular culture are more likely to influence perspectives.

Social attachments and relationships are a key theme among other studies into 'risky' behaviours. During a focus-group study into youth perceptions on cyberbullying, participants discussed sharing passwords, personal information and private photographs with friends, and yet often only considered these actions 'risky' *after* trust had been broken (Mishna, Saini and Soloman, 2009). Risk is often associated with negative emotions, but this may only be the case if there is an emphasis on negative outcomes. Lyng's (1990) concept of 'edgework' explores how risk-taking can be a positive experience, strengthening not only an individual sense of self, but also social bonds within a group. Collective emotions clearly matter, with research highlighting how 'mood' or 'vibe' was a key factor in young people's risk assessments (Pilkington, 2007). Research also suggests trust, intimacy, romance, excitement and proximity (of relationships) affect how youth construct risk - or rather lack of – in a digital context (Mishna et al, 2009; Pyzalski, 2012; Gabriel, 2014). Risk may be very much "underpinned by assumptions about mutual accountability" (Lupton 1992: 12). Although this research is focused upon assessments of risk to a specific sender, it will therefore be important to note how groups react emotionally to the example posts, and whether constructs of relationships or shared accountability affect their judgements of each post.

Emotions are neither rational nor irrational, but simply represent another kind of knowledge or intelligence, according to Thrift (quoted in Lupton, 2013: 641). In many ways the rational/emotional dichotomy potentially exacerbates power inequalities between ordinary people and proclaimed experts, who are often constructed as more scientific and 'objective' in their assessment of risk (Foucault 1991; Kelly, 2001; Lupton 1999). Lupton (2013) claims this is a fallacy, as emotion (in particular negative emotions, such as guilt, disgust, shame and fear) are frequently employed by policy makers attempting to influence public behaviour. Beck (1992) has written about what he perceives as the growing mistrust in experts in the 'Risk Society'. What is apparent is that risk judgments depend largely on *who* is positioned the expert, with young people potentially valuing the views and norms of their peers above that of adults (Fox, 1999; Pilkington, 2007; Gabriel, 2014). Therefore, this research will attempt to investigate how emotions and relationships may be used as frames of reference (e.g. a close friend representing a valid source of knowledge) in relation to young people's perceptions about risk, or whether more traditional sources of public risk 'expertise' (e.g. government resources, the media) are cited.

Another aspect that will be investigated by this study is the extent to which perceptions of risk are 'shared' by a group, whether there are individual disagreements in a peer setting, and how these are managed if they arise. Shariff (2015: 142) states, "Within young people's own peer groups there are unwritten boundaries of conformity and compliance… Youth can be judged by peer developed codes of conduct as well as laws developed by adults". Pilkington (2007) also argues that risk perceptions emerge from shared, 'taken-for-granted' knowledge and assumptions, specifically situated in social and cultural groups. Peers also appear to play a key role in social norms and policing. Olweus (1995) argues the number of cyberbullying incidents reduces among groups of young people who actively participate in the creation of responsibilities, boundaries and codes of conduct. This research should be able to shed some light on how young people construct risk and responsibility *as part of a group*, and highlight where there is disagreement or consensus. This potentially could contribute further to understandings of how youth-led, peer support initiatives may be incorporated into discussions of risk-management, responsibility and online interactions in educational, technological and legal settings more broadly.

C. Stigma, stereotypes and labelling:

'Risky teenagers' is a common construction evident in both theoretical writings about childhood and in empirical studies. Reyna & Farley (2006: 7) note, "The scientific literature confirms the commonsense belief that adolescence is a period of inordinate risk taking." However, it is important to critically interrogate how such 'commonsense beliefs' may have influenced research design and findings over the years in such a way as to (perhaps unintentionally) confirm what we feel we already know. By using a symbolic/cultural approach to understanding risk, one can see how youth itself has become synonymous with risk and deviance. Teenagers occupy a unique social status that is 'neither-child-nor-adult'; a stage of 'in-betweenness', which challenges "culturally accepted boundaries… [Through] inhabiting a position of liminality or hybridity" (Lupton 2013: 640). Socially, politically and culturally, there are frequent attempts to impose boundaries and categorize youth according to age (as is evident in the U.K. schooling system and also the legal system, where young people are afforded different rights and responsibilities according to their years) (Muncie, 2009; 2014). This represents an attempt to construct a straightforward framework through which to view young people's development, and arguably will never accurately reflect the complexities and processes involved in 'becoming an adult' for each and every child. Kelly (2001:30) argues techniques of neo-liberal governance increasingly attempt to normalize young people into becoming "rational, choice-making citizens (to be)" as they age. It will therefore be important to explore within this research any differences in perceptions of risk between different aged groups of children.

Young people are often constructed as 'deviants' in relation to crime and justice, too, problematized in terms of deficiency and delinquency, particularly when it comes to any form of anti-social activity (Muncie, 2009; 2014). This may be reinforced by the construction of social problems as "matters of individual wickedness rather than failures of collective responsibility", even when it comes to very young offenders (Jewkes, 2011: 112). Youth can be stereotyped within a false dichotomy as either 'risky', i.e. deviant potential offenders, or 'at-risk', innocent potential victims (see: Baker, 2018 and BBC News, 2013), much like constructs of 'ideal' victims and offenders within criminology (Christie, 1986). Yet the literature in this area asserts that children who abuse and children who are abused tend to be *one and the same* (Kelly 2001; Powell and Edwards, 2003; Shariff, 2015). There is a symbolic function at work in this stereotyping of young people as deviant, irresponsible and risky on an emotional and moral level, as well as a cultural one: "to take unnecessary risks is

commonly seen as foolhardy, careless, irresponsible, and even 'deviant', evidence of an individual's ignorance or lack of ability to regulate self" (Lupton, 1999a: 149). In essence, young people may already be positioned in opposition to the 'ideal, self-managing, responsible' (adult) citizen. This emphasises the need for research to take into consideration young people's perspectives, particularly in relation to peer-to-peer behaviours online, as it may offer a counter-narrative to some of these stereotypes.

D. Youth 'At-Risk' and in need of protection

Notions of 'innocence' and 'vulnerability' surrounding children are well documented by sociologists interested in youth, with concerns about risks to children often reflecting a symbolic fear that childhood itself is under threat (Kitzinger, 1988; Buckingham, 2000; Kelly, 2001; Powell and Edwards, 2003; Livingstone, 2009). In Lupton and Tulloch's (2002) empirical study into risk perspectives, parents of both genders highlight risks to their children as a particular concern, whether that be financial, emotional or physical. There is a recurring theme within the literature on children and risk online that often positions young people primarily and automatically as potential victims, although we know that they can also perpetrate abuse (Mishna et al, 2011; Strom et al, 2011; Olweus, 2012; Korenis and Billick, 2014; Shariff, 2005; 2009). This may reflect a wider trend towards positioning citizens generally as being 'at risk' as potential crime victims (Garland, 2000; 2001), although children and young people occupy a uniquely high position when comes to risk priorities (Darbyshire, 2007). Traditional protectionist approaches towards childhood means that 'at-risk' labels can be applied from the outset whenever 'youth' is considered – regardless of context (Lubeck and Garret, 1990). Even alternative labels with more positive connotations, such as 'at-promise', to some extent continue to position children as 'potential adults' rather than beings in their own right (Swandener and Lubeck, 1995; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). This approach to risk management, especially focused upon children's future potential as adults, certainly supports the theory that risk-management strategies are part of attempts to control or colonise the future (Giddens, 1991). This is another argument for why this research provides an important contribution by considering young people in their own right, providing a 'snapshot' of different perspectives without attempting to use this as a tool for prediction or prevention of risk per se.

Kitzinger (1988: 83) claims it actually disadvantages children to construct them as passive, weak and powerless, calling for "rights and resources" as opposed to "pity and protection" in order to best support them. Within psychology, it has been

suggested that over-protective parenting may have a negative impact on children, with claims that exposure to risk are an important aspect of psychosocial development (Ungar, 2009; Furedi, 2002). While risks to contemporary childhood are complex and varied - ranging from sexualisation, to commodification, adultification and commercialisation - Derbyshire (2007: 92) claims, "the single biggest factor limiting children's opportunities… are parents' perceptions of danger". Conversely, *restricting* opportunities to interact with the online world potentially carries long-term social, economic and psychological disadvantages to young people, making a protectionist approach somewhat undesirable (Livingstone, 2009). This is starting to be acknowledged by groups such as 'Internet Matters' whose advice to parents has shifting to focusing on developing young people's digital resilience skills rather than using technical controls, filters or spyware to monitor children's activities (Bunting, 2018.) It seems the desire to protect children from harm may be a symbolic one as much as a fear of literal danger, in-keeping with the symbolic/cultural approach (Douglas, 1992; 2 . Heath (1997: 26) criticizes the "relentless appropriation of the child and its childhood as the fulfilment of the parent or parents". This raises the question of the notion of reputation-management as being as aspect of parental constructs of 'risk' to their children online, and so this research will also investigate perceptions of social or reputational risks, as well as criminal or legal risks. The idea of protecting oneself from social or reputational risk through self-managing our online profile and online content links in strongly with the concept of the ideal citizen and governmentality.

E. The Ideal Citizen as 'self-managing' risk

Young people are considered risky, first and foremost, because they are 'not adults'. Children have historically always been positioned in opposition to adults and since the ideal citizen is constructed as rational, responsible and self-managing, the child (not-adult) is often constructed as irrational, irresponsible and incompetent, only gaining adult status once they have demonstrated qualities of the ideal citizen (Kelly, 2001; Leonard, 2007). This is a narrative present in Lupton and Tulloch's (2002: 325-6) research: participants "talked about their reckless younger days and not thinking about or realizing that they were at risk... They commented that looking back from a position of greater maturity and the caution that comes with age and increased responsibility, they now realized the risky nature of their activities". These findings cannot however be used as objective 'proof' that risk-taking decreases with age. Research by McAfee (2012) has highlighted how young people and adults differ on

what kinds of behaviour is acceptable online, indicating that it may be simply that our perceptions of what is risky changes as we grow older, another reason to consider comparisons of risk perspectives between older and younger participants.

The construction of the adult self as 'knowledgeable' about risk sits well with Foucault's (1991) theories of discourse and power, with youth occupying a marginal position due to (amongst other things) their apparent *lack* of knowledge and experience. Studies specifically exploring young people's perceptions of risk also seem to insist that term is not a part of children's vocabulary. Studies by Pilkington (2007) and Austen (2009) highlight the absence of the actual word 'risk' from their young participants, with terms such as 'bad', 'legal', 'allowed', 'dangerous' or 'serious' quoted in reference to various activities instead. However, this may be influenced by the ways in which adults approach the topic of risk with children. The EU Kids Online project (Hasebrink et al, 2009) initially explored youth perceptions of risk online without including 'risk' in the research question. Instead researchers asked about what *would bother* young people online. Meanwhile, Ofcom's (2014: 3) study of online risk "did not specifically ask children about 'risks'", instead the *researchers* categorized behaviours as 'risks' at the analysis stage. Without asking young participants *specifically about risks* it becomes problematic to assess their knowledge, understanding and perceptions of them, which is one reason why this study is doing just that.

Contrary to popular assumption, empirical studies suggest young people are highly risk-aware online, and actively create strategies to manage risk in a digital context. Marwick and boyd's (2014a) analysis of interviews in relation to online privacy showed young people to be conscious, considered and pro-active in terms of how they formed and maintained their digital relationships and reputation. Smahel and Wright (2014: 9) claim "self-monitoring", "planning", "strategizing" and "reflecting on ways to avoid risky online problematic situations" is common among children, alongside "avoidance tactics" and "proactive strategies" to manage risks. Older adolescents also seem to be primarily concerned about reputation and future job prospects: "'The future' seemed to be a trigger that made some older teens more mindful about how they should manage their online conduct, so as not to damage their opportunities in the 'adult' world" (Ofcom 2014:5) That being said, this conclusion should perhaps be taken with a pinch of salt, as the design of the survey questionnaire meant that children were prompted to respond to questions about risk and 'the future'. Nevertheless, these studies potentially contradict the social

construction of young people as reckless risk-takers. This research is therefore attempting to understand under what circumstances young people might identify online conduct as 'risky' (and therefore in need of risk management strategies) in the first place, and to explore whether reputational concerns are viewed as on a par with ethical, legal or criminal risks.

More research is also needed into how young people construct *themselves* in terms of identifying and managing risk online. It is likely adolescent participants (particularly older ones) will reject protectionist suggestions of vulnerability and innocence, preferring to see themselves as active, empowered individuals. This has been highlighted by Pilkington's (2007) research findings, which suggest young people narrate their drug-taking decisions as individual choice, even when they are clearly social and communal behaviours. This is similar to results from Austen's (2009) study into youth perceptions of risk and Jenkins' (2006: 390) semi-structured interviews with 11-15 year olds about risk in relation to outdoor play: "young people tended to present themselves as being socially competent already and, as such, capable of managing physical risk". This research therefore aims to shed light on individualized narratives of risk or risk-management from young participants in relation online behaviours, as well as the extent to which peer, communal, cultural and social influences (e.g. normalization and neutralization) are dominant themes.

F. Risk and status: Exclusion and innovation

Perceptions of risk are linked perceptions of self and one's place in the world. Douglas (1992: 262) argues social positioning (i.e. status) influences constructions of risk everyday life, developing a grid-group model of risk typologies (see Fig. E). She claims in the 'Excluded' social group (those under a high level of structural constraint but with a low degree of incorporation) will perceive risk differently to those, for example, in the 'Entrepreneur' group (low incorporation combined with low structural constraint). She also argues lower levels of structural constraint allow for more autonomy, thus creating the perception for 'Entrepreneurs' of being more in control of managing risk than 'Excluded' persons. This theory is an interesting way of thinking about researching risk, although one of the drawbacks of in-depth, qualitative research into risk perceptions is the lack of diversity among the samples, which makes the relevance of the Grid-Group theory difficult to assess (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002; Pilkington, 2007; Austin, 2009).

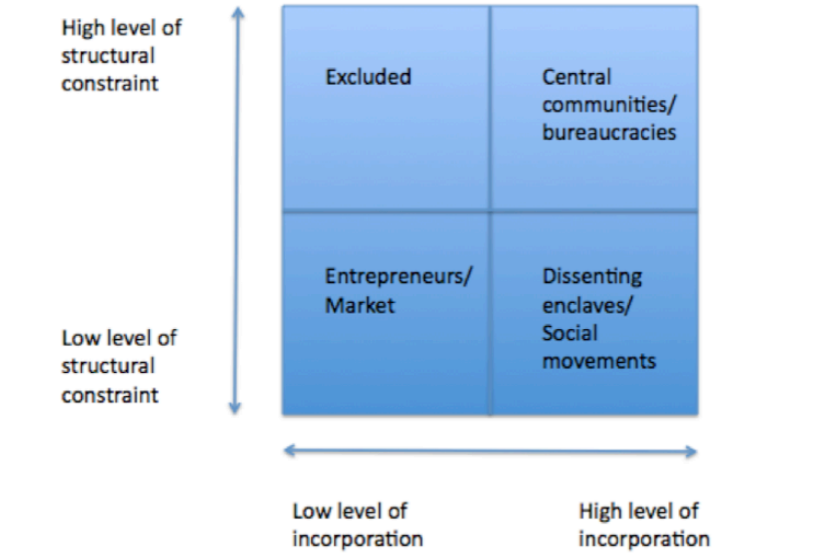

Fig. E: Grid-group model (Douglas 1992: 262, appearing in Arnoldi, 2009)

According to this model, the common construction of teenagers as having a 'laissez-faire' attitude to risk may be linked to their lower-ranking social status/marginalized position (Kitzinger, 1988; Jackson and Scott, 1999). Ethnographic research from the 90s into sexual health behaviours among African Americans provides some support for this theory of 'excluded' groups as having a more fatalistic attitude to risk, based on participant observation over two years with 53 women and girls, most of whom self-reported as poor and working class (White, 1999). White theorized that when people are excluded (i.e. made to feel powerless), they disengage from traditional 'risk-conscious' behaviour. This is referred to as 'urban cynicism', as the author argues that labeling people as 'fatalistic' (a term used by Douglas) ascribes unfair negative connotations and judgments (White, 1999: 190).

Other empirical studies appear to support the notion that power and status is relevant to risk. Research suggests that prevalence (of victimization *and* participation) of digital forms of abuse may be higher among ethnic minorities, and that gender inequalities also affect young people's perceptions of risk, blame and responsibility (Ringrose et al, 2012; Gabriel, 2014; Shariff, 2015; Salter, 2017.) Similarly, labelling theories (particularly concepts of 'secondary deviance') suggest that marginalization could contribute to 'urban cynicism', potentially resulting in variation among risk perceptions within minority, under-represented or lower status groups (Lemert, 1967; 1981; Becker, 1973). Symbolic interactionism critiques the notion of 'attitudes' and the suggestion 'fixed' or pre-destined views and behaviour among particular individuals, with the term 'perspectives' preferred, as it reflects the ever-changing and active

nature of interpretations, which occur in the present moment, as each new situation unfolds (Charon, 2010).. However, an interactionist approach would also acknowledge how our experiences and interactions with the outside world may influence our perceptions of self, and in turn our behaviour

This means identify features of participants, such as race, gender, age and class, are important to note when undertaking social research into risk perceptions. Lupton and Tulloch's (2002) predominantly white, educated, middle-class sample of Australians highlighted intolerance and racism as a 'generalized' (but not individualised) example of risk. Feelings of incorporation or marginalization may influence how risk is perceived. There is a challenge however for empirical, qualitative, focus group research to obtain representative samples, making it difficult to compare or asses these aspects. There is some scope to explore how a consensus (i.e. a dominant perspective) may be reached, or rejected, through group interactions, even within less diverse groups (Blumer, 1969). While it may not be so much that young people's social position has a direct bearing on their risk perspectives, they will be constructed in response to the social world around them, with their experiences therefore having the potential to shape these. Symbolic interactionism claims that our sense of self as an object ('me') is intrinsically linked to our sense of self in terms of action, perception and behaviour ('I') and visa versa (Blumer, 1969). As previously highlighted, constructions of risk may be completely at odds with those of 'risk experts', and rely more on hermeneutic, aesthetic or emotional judgements – of both self and the social world (Pilkington, 2007).

Innovation and restraint are common themes within theoretical considerations of the sociology of risk. Lupton (1999) explores how the idea of deliberately taking risks as part of testing human limits - whether physical or psychological – can be viewed in a positive light in terms of helping to 'free oneself' from the regulations and restraints in everyday life. This is also part of Lyng's (1990) concept of 'edgework', where 'setting oneself apart from the crowd' through risk-taking behaviours, be that extreme sports or exotic drugs, is in many ways encouraged in contemporary culture. These ideas are also present in the ways that we discuss the 'entrepreneurial' opportunities for young people and the Internet. Buckingham (2008) argues children can longer positioned as passive 'consumers' of media, as they now also constitute a bulk of the 'producers' of content, reinforcing the notion of the child as a digital 'actor' (Hasebrink et al, 2009). Their desire to participate in culture, combined with technological skills and the participatory culture of the digital world has led some to argue that the youth

voice is now gaining more attention than ever (Jenkins, 2006). Young people are therefore increasingly viewed as potential digital *entrepreneurs* or *innovators* (e.g. Macaskill, 2017). We know that both risks and opportunities increase the more time a child spends online, but for the ideal, neo-liberal citizen there is perhaps the added expectation to *transform* potential risks *into* opportunities - particularly in pursuit of cultural goals such as wealth, popularity and influence. Kelly (2006) argues that the construct of the 'entrepreneurial self' also functions as a technique of neoliberal governance; the positive flipside of the negative 'at-risk' label applied so often to youth. This research will therefore attempt to explore whether young people critique dependent, passive, fatalistic attitudes to risk in favour of an 'entrepreneurial' ideal.

G. Norms and Deviance

Risk perspectives are interlinked with constructs of responsibility and therefore morality. The Risk Society, Cultural/Symbolic and Governmentality perspectives all acknowledge the importance of moral frameworks in firstly defining what is risky, but perhaps more importantly, how responsibility for risk is constructed (Lupton, 1999a). Risky activities can result in not just acts themselves being condemned, but also individuals or even entire groups of people, similar to criminological theories of labelling and deviance (Becker, 1967). The moralizing of risk and blame becomes particularly problematic when extended to include children, who are unlikely to be deemed fully responsible for their actions[11]. The responsibilisation of citizens to self-manage risk (e.g. within narratives of public health campaigns, crime prevention initiatives or advertising) often targets particular groups, resulting in overtly moral judgments: "stigmatization, marginalization, blaming and exclusion" (Lupton, 2013: 645). Ronson (2015) also highlights how a moralized desire to 'do good', right wrongs and hold people to account can, conversely, lead to punitive public shaming, humiliation, threats or abuse online. Judgments about risk may therefore vary depending on the moral framing (of the specifics of a situation and the actors involved), and this in turn may relate to broader social and moral norms underpinning these perceptions. This research will therefore aims to take note of any indication of moral judgements – of both behaviour and individuals – among participant responses to risk.

Perceptions of moral or social acceptability online are likely to vary according to a number of factors. In one cyberbullying study, 154 teenagers aged 12-16 used a

[11] There are of course some notable exceptions, such as the two 10-year-olds who stood a full adult trial for the killing of James Bulger in the 1980s (Jewkes, 2011)

Likert scale to rate the how 'acceptable' the behaviour was of a protagonist in various vignettes, via an anonymous survey (Talwar et al, 2014). Findings suggest that 'intention to harm' was the most significant to factor when it came to moral evaluations of a protagonist's actions. In contrast, boyd's (2014) ethnographic research into teenagers and social networking suggests an 'imbalance of power' is the most important aspect, with participants arguing even actions intended to cause harm may not be considered 'bullying', unless one party was more powerful than the other. Other empirical research suggests that some young people may not have *any* moral concerns about certain types of cyber abuse, or consider the Internet as having a different set of moral codes to the offline world (Li, 2010; Selwyn, 2008). This highlights the need for social research to investigate why certain examples of behaviour may *not* be considered problematic by young people, as much as why others are. This study will therefore dedicate a certain amount of attention to how and why example posts may be defended by participants, as well as potentially condemned.

Young people may also see some kinds of harmful digital behaviour as morally justified. Research with 365 Canadian 11-15-year-olds explores the motivations for cyberbullying, with students asked if they had harassed or bullied someone online, and why (Cassidy et al., 2009: 390). The top responses included:

- 'Because they did not like the person (14%);
- Because that person had upset them (13%);
- Because they were bullied first and so it was acceptable to bully back (10%);
- Because their friends had bullied, so it was acceptable (9%);
- Because it was fun (7%)'

The data was gathered from questionnaire results, exploring 192 variables in relation to cyberbullying. Although the majority of the data was quantitative, they argue in-depth qualitative analysis of responses to their open ended questions provided further insight into perceptions of cyberbullying. Similarly, a study into teenagers' perspectives on 'happy slapping' (when an assault is filmed and the footage uploaded online) claimed to indicate a shift in perceptions of responsibility; a "breakdown in morality in general, from individuals to culture and society" (Palasinski, 2013: 1916). Participants' responses in both studies do not necessarily attempt to deny the behaviours were wrong, but rather they attempt to argue some justification for it, thereby perhaps constructing some relief from individual responsibility.

Within the field of criminology, potential justifications for 'bad' behaviour are known as 'Techniques of Neutralization', which are employed as a way to simultaneously acknowledge behaviours as morally problematic, while attempting to 'neutralise' negative emotions (guilt, shame etc.) associated with them (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Maruna and Copes, 2005). The five techniques are originally outlined as: Denial of Responsibility; Denial of Injury; Denial of the Victim; Condemnation of the Condemners; and Appeal to Higher Loyalties. A common theme among young respondents in Pyzalski's (2013) happy slapping study was essentially to 'blame the media' i.e. violence within visual cultures, which could have been theorised as potentially both a 'Denial of Responsibility' and a 'Condemnation of the Condemners' (although the author did not specifically engage with this theory in the study). Theories of neutralisation, and theories of denial, are important to consider when participants may have lower perceptions of risk, or attempt to justify/normalise certain behaviours (Skyes and Matza, 1957; Cohen, 2001). The extent to which some online content may not be viewed as morally problematic at all is empirically significant as that which are universally or unilaterally condemned, which is why this will be a focus within this research.

Douglas (1992; 2002) claims what is risky is that which challenges or subverts the social or moral order. However, it is possible that problematic online behaviour may also mimic or uphold dominant views, rather than challenge or subvert them. Shariff (2015) notes how cyber-bullying among young people tends to emulate existing social prejudices, such as misogyny, homophobia and racism. Similarly, it has been claimed that evidence shows "students are more likely to be cyber-bullied because of specific attributes such as special needs, academic abilities, unpopularity, physical appearance, physical and mental disabilities, unfashionable clothing, ethnicity and sexual orientation" (Cassidy et al, 2009: 209). Particularly in the case of digital sexual offences or image-based abuse ('revenge porn', etc.), victim blaming appears to be so common as to essentially represent the 'norm', essentially *upholding* existing sexist and misogynistic attitudes within culture and society (Salter, 2017; Bailey and Steeves, 2015; Ringrose et al, 2012). Young people exhibiting these behaviours are not so much subverting or deviating from the social and moral order, instead their perspectives are being influenced by it.

It may be also that victim blaming represents a prioritising of offenders' rights and freedoms, rather than necessarily a pre-existing prejudice against victims. One study into young people's digital behaviours claims participants viewed themselves as

having a right to say whatever they like online, so long as it *reinforces* existing social norms and hierarchies (Li, 2010). The democratization of publishing and broadcasting as a result of new technology means that punitive or humiliating forms of 'media justice' exhibited by the tabloid press can now be just as easily be mimicked by everyone with access to a social media account (Greer and McLaughlin, 2012; Ronson, 2015). Buckingham (2008) argues much of youth media production seems to imitate and abide by 'norms' set by the mainstream media, so this may potentially include punitive (social) media public shaming for those who're perceived to have 'done wrong'. Dubreuil (2010) also claims that the public expression of punitive emotions (contempt, disgust, aggression etc.) essentially function to uphold a social or moral order. Interestingly this is not applied equally, however: It is argued that there is more risk involved in expressing negative emotions towards those with a higher social status than us, suggesting those of a low social status are far more likely to be on the receiving end of negative judgments, and behaviour. The same argument is often made with regard to deviance, and this too can potentially reveal something about perceptions of a power hierarchies, as much as moral and social norms (Becker, 1967; 1973).

In some cases, risky behaviour may be seen as morally justified if it is part of attempts to manage other risks (this could also align with the 'Appeal to Higher Loyalties' technique of neutralisation) (Skyes and Matza, 1957). Ethnographic research with young people seems to provide empirical support for the concept of 'risk hierarchies' – essentially that some risks are perceived as more of a priority to manage than others. For example, the social and emotional risk of being negatively judged or rejected by peers may override the health or criminal risks associated with drug taking (Pilkington, 2007), while girls who participate in sexting may utilize the practice as a way of withholding from physical sexual acts, while simultaneously adhering to gendered social expectations (Ringrose et al., 2012). Risk judgments do not take place within a vacuum; social norms and pressures within a specific situation may result in individuals choosing the 'path of least risk' (which may still be constructed by a social audience as unacceptably risky or deviant). For young people especially, concerns around reputation, inclusion and acceptance among social groups are likely to be a huge influence on how risk is conceptualised, and so this will also be a key consideration of this research.

H. Balancing Rights: Power, Protections and Freedoms

Power, authority and responsibility are central themes in relation to risk, with all three risk perspectives including ideas relating to a 'social order' or 'power structure'; whether it is status granted in being able to define what is risky or influencing power as an 'expert', providing knowledge and solutions for managing risk (Douglas, 1992; Beck, 1992; Foucault,1991). Young people arguably occupy a low status/marginalised position in society, meaning their perspectives are often excluded from debates about how best to protect children from risk (Kitzinger, 1988; Muncie, 2009; 2014; Livingstone, 2009; Best, 2007). Perhaps one of the clearest examples highlighting the imbalance of power between children and adults can be demonstrated by the Children's Act 1989, with parental rights *over* children apparently exceeding those of parental duties *towards* children (Fig. F):

Parental Rights	Parental Duties
1. The right to determine where the child should live 2. The right to determine education 3. The right to determine religion 4. The right to discipline the child 5. The right to consent to the child's marriage 6. The right to authorize medical treatment 7. The right to administer the child's property 8. The right to appoint a guardian 9. The right to agree to adoption 10. The right to change the child's name	1. The duty to protect the child 2. The duty the maintain the child 3. The duty to secure the child's education 4. The duty to control the child

Fig. F: *Parental rights and parental duties as outlined in The Children's Act 1989, adapted from Allen (2005: 23)*

The social construction of youth seems to simultaneously encourage *and* discourage children from behaving 'like adults', especially when it comes to risk. On the one hand, children are problematic or pathologised if they engage in 'risky' behaviours considered acceptable for adults (e.g., drinking alcohol, smoking or participating in any kind of sexual interaction). On the other hand, children appear to be increasingly responsibilised to manage their own behaviour and emulate the risk-aware, responsible, autonomous 'ideal citizen' associated with adulthood (Barnard-Wills, 2012). There are similar contradictions for adults. Those with responsibilities for children (particularly parents and teachers) are told that risk is something needing to be minimised and managed, yet also told that risk taking behaviours are a normal,

even healthy, aspect of young people's development (Lievens, 2011; Ungar, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Parker and Stanworth, 2005). Empirical findings from the EU Kids Online (Hasebrink et al., 2009) suggest children may be adversely affected by a multitude of behaviours and content - while others may be hardly negatively affected at all - making it almost impossible for teachers and parents to know which risks even ought to be prioritized.

Children, as a marginalized group, do not hold the same power as adults to define what is risky or advise on how risk ought to be best managed (Kitzinger, 1988; Jackson and Scott, 1999). Yet empirical evidence suggests they are aware of online risks, with many taking active steps to manage these (Staksrud and Livingstone, 2009; Marwick and boyd, 2014a; Smahel and Wright, 2014). The social environment may create pressures on 'responsible' adults to subject children to surveillance of their digital activities in order to protect them, something that echoes patterns of paternalism in wider society: "judgments about what is morally proper or acceptable" are replaced by "discourses of safety, security" resulting in a "proliferation of moral panics as an ordering practice in late modernity" (Hier, 2003, quoted in Savirimuthu, 2012: 60). This is echoed by theories of 'dangerization' replacing traditional constructs of risk or deviance (Lianos and Douglas, 2000.) These anxieties about dangers to children are perhaps are exacerbated by ideas about technology being dangerous in itself, particularly any digital spaces constructed as 'risky' zones, where adults are excluded (Strom et al, 2011). The notion of the parental gaze looms large, even if that gaze is considered to be a watchful, loving and supportive one.

Therefore there is a huge challenge in findings ways to balance youth rights and freedoms with appropriate levels of protection and security. Lupton (1999) claims most contemporary risk practices tend to categorize people either as *active citizens*, (capable of managing their own risk autonomously, independently and responsibly) or as *targeted populations* (who are at risk or risky, and need managing). Those who take an empirical, youth-centered approach to investigating online risks have repeatedly warned *against* excessive controls, monitoring and surveillance of children's digital lives (Livingstone, 2009; boyd, 2014; Shariff, 2015). Despite this, many 'recommendations' from youth cyber research continue to include "suggestions for new protocols and new legislation that would respond to a new type of child-offender" (Cesaroni et al, 2012: 200). At the same time, the responsibilisation of young people to individually self-manage risks online - independently and autonomously - is also ethically problematic, contravening the UNCRC framework on

children's rights. Strategies employed in the identification, observation and management of risk are often conceptualized as symbolic attempts to 'colonize the future' (Giddens, 1991). As children and youth are so often culturally symbolic of 'the future', it is unsurprising they are so heavily intertwined with risk management strategies and approaches.

Boyd (2014) and others have called for childhood to be considered as a social state, as much as a psychological or physiological one, as the limitations of children are often assumed to be biological or cognitive scientific 'fact', without consideration of the social, cultural and political structures that withhold power from young people (Kitzinger, 1988; Livingstone, 2009). For adolescents undergoing a period of intense scrutiny in terms of risk and *identity* (from both peers and society at large), concerns about reputational, social or emotional risk may be amplified beyond the 'existential anxiety' or 'ontological insecurity' that adults face in late modernity (Giddens, 1991). Too much of the existing research into youth and online risk fails to address the power imbalances between adults and children, and does not explore risk as a part of children and young people's vocabulary. Researchers must be wary of the temptation to take on the 'expert' status themselves, and try to remain open to understanding youth perspectives (which may contradict their own). Equally, definitions of 'digitally risky behaviour' need to be made clearer, while at the same time leaving broad scope for interpretation and discussion on the part of young participants, whose perspectives ought to be prioritised if the research is with them.

Conclusion

> "Risk is a calculation. Risk is a commodity. Risk is a capital. Risk is a technique of government. Risk is objective and scientifically knowable. Risk is subjective and socially constructed. Risk is a problem, a threat, a source of insecurity. Risk is a pleasure, a thrill, a source of profit and freedom. Risk is the means whereby we colonize and control the future." (Garland 2003: 49)

Risk is a complex notion, exacerbated by false dichotomies, such as adult/child, online/offline, norm/deviance, emotional/rational, etc. Definitions of cyberbullying, aggressive or risky behaviours online are too often based on researchers' assumptions without sufficient consideration of the social, cultural, moral and political influences underpinning what is viewed to be a problem or a risk in the first place (Loseke, 1999; Lupton, 1999a). A few notable studies allow young people to define

for themselves what is risky or troublesome, but even then, the absence of the word 'risk' in research design/methodologies gives the (potentially false) impression that this is not part of children's vocabulary or understanding. Risk is not always a burden or stress, but can be a pleasure or opportunity; motivated by positive emotions, individual innovation, or the strength and intimacy of social bonds. It is important to remember that risk-taking behaviour may be used to escape or subvert existing social orders, or to uphold or reinforce them, or sometimes even be a way of attempting to manage other risks. Risk-taking can be viewed as a normal, healthy part of development, and even be encouraged if it coincides with constructs of an 'entrepreneurial' or adult, 'self-managing' identity. Micro and macro social contexts need to be considered when conducting research into risk perceptions and, above all, openness to consider a wide variety of potentially contradictory interpretations of the very meaning of 'risk' itself. Above all, this study needs to be open to a variety of potentially contradicting ideas about what risk is and how this is judged, something that will need to involve taking a youth-centred, interpretive approach as part of the methodology and ethics.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will address how the literature and context has shaped the research questions and design, and outline the rationale behind the methods and approach to this study. As highlighted through the review of existing studies into risk, youth and digital media, there are a number of ways to approach undertaking research in this area. 'Risk' is a complex social, moral and political construct, at times underpinned by apparently contradictory meanings, perspectives and interpretations. Risk theorists have been criticized for lacking in empirical evidence, while cyber studies with young people can at times be somewhat a-theoretical. In addition, studies involving children do not always explicitly highlight 'risk' as being the central focus of the study or even use the term when asking young participants questions. Therefore, the starting point for the research design will be to focus on empirical, qualitative methods of investigating young people's perceptions of risk, while attempting to explicitly highlight 'risk' as the main area of interest and focus.

Other highlights from the literature include the need to consider the contexts and circumstances that may influence risk judgements, as same actions can be perceived differently in terms of legality, morality and social acceptability depending on the circumstances. Key theories relating to the social construction of risk and deviance emphasise the role that a 'social audience' plays in ascribing meaning to behaviour, assessing the risk and laying out blame or responsibility. This means that the research design needs to essentially position the young participants as a social audience for behaviours, and consider diversity and variation in the range of behaviours being judged. Open questions will be essential to ensure that the findings are led by the data and not the researcher's own assumptions. At the same time, is also desirable to be able to make some comparative analysis where possible - for example on the basis of gender or age, which in turn requires that there be some uniformity in the process of gathering data and the questions asked of participants.

A reminder of the research questions for this study:

1. What kinds of content are perceived by young people to be 'riskier' or 'less risky' for a sender to post online, and why? What kinds of sender conduct are considered 'risker' or 'less risky', and why? What are the key factors or

common aspects influencing how risky this content/conduct is perceived to be?

2. How do young people interpret and construct 'risk' in an online/digital context? In what ways are those assertions challenged or reinforced among a peer group discussion among participants, and on what basis?

3. What might these perspectives and interactions indicate about broader perceptions of the online/digital environment, law and policing, authority and power, responsibility, rights and freedoms, norms and deviance, etc.?

4. How do justifications of risk perspectives (e.g. labelling, condemnation, explanation, neutralisation or denial, in response to content/conduct) relate to existing theories of risk and deviance as social constructs?

2.1 Methodology and Methods

a. Ontology, Epistemology and Research Values

This research takes an interactionist approach, adhering to the belief that knowledge and meaning is constructed through subjective interactions and interpretations (created within specific social contexts) (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2010.) Researchers and participants are inextricably linked as co-creators in the construction of knowledge, and social research is, in itself, a form of interpretation of the social world. Observation of, and participation in, social worlds and gathering of qualitative data (for example through dialogue) is therefore the most effective approach to research. Instead of traditional positivist assessments of 'validity', 'reproducibility' and 'reliability', the value of social research should be judged on alternatively worded criteria, such as trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity, in order to acknowledge the interpretive nature of enquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Before embarking on data gathering, it was vital to consider the values underpinning my approach to judging social research and so this list of criteria was compiled alongside the literature review, and is as follows:

Constructionist: The researcher acknowledges subjectivity and therefore tries to avoid positivist statements or generalizations. 'Knowledge' consists of social constructions, but where there is some relative consensus and/or supporting evidence.

Analytical: Data is elaborated on and explored in relation to the social world and theory, rather than in isolation. There is an attempt to link findings with theories and concepts, and research is not purely descriptive.

Empirical: Direct observation, first-hand experience and evidence-based data are the foundation of 'findings', which can then be extended via theory into 'conclusions'. The researcher will attempt to explore how empirical data can support or contradict ideas.

Qualitative: Research is rich, complex and detailed, and aims to attend to 'how', 'in what ways' and 'why' questions in relation to human behaviour, rather than just 'what'. Research attempts to investigate social processes and interactions, not simply products or outcomes.

Interpretive: There is acknowledgement that 'meanings' can be multiple, varying and, at times, contradictory, with critical investigation of 'common sense' assumptions or definitions (including the researcher's own.) This means at times that there are multiple potential interpretations explored of particular findings and data.

Impact: Research aims to have significance and practical relevance beyond academic study. Conclusions that provide useful insights are considered higher in value than those that only serve academic or theoretical aims. These are primarily explored within the 'Conclusions' chapter, although alluded to throughout.

Innovation: Research is novel or unique in terms of subject, methods and/or findings, in the case of this study, ideally all three. The purpose of research is to challenge or develop theory, develop and test new methodology and contribute to empirical datasets within the field.

Participant-focused: Research aims to explore social worlds through the eyes of participants, involving immersion and interaction. Research should be conducted 'with' (not 'on') participants, acknowledging collaborative processes of constructing meaning.

Researcher presence: The researcher's 'voice' is present, and their stance, values, assumptions, context, influences and ideas aim to be transparent and included, rather than left a mystery. The researcher does not attempt to 'distance' themselves too far from their work.

Reflexive: Research acknowledges influences, limitations, challenges and criticisms of their work. The researcher is acknowledged as central to the construction of

meaning throughout the process, and aims to demonstrate awareness of this influence on the design and findings.

Ethical: Research prioritises people at all times (i.e. the needs and well-being of the participants and the researcher will be considered of higher importance than the aims of the research). Research will aim to be transparent, honest, authentic and fair (to both participants and audiences/readers), even if this means sacrificing theoretical or methodological 'purity' in the way that knowledge is constructed.

B. Ethnographic influences

An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to get as close to participants (and as immersed in their meaning-making interaction processes) as it is possible to get. Emerging from the field of anthropology, ethnography supports the belief that social phenomena ought to be studied within their natural environment/original contexts wherever possible, with findings based upon empirical study 'in the field' - hence the term 'fieldwork' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland and Lofland, 2001). Small scale, in-depth research within specific social contexts tends to be favoured over large-scale projects, due to the intensive and time-consuming nature of the process. This is one reason why ethnographers should not attempt to generalize from their findings (or rather, generalisability should be based upon theoretical, rather than statistical inference). This major difference of this study from traditional ethnography is the fact that fieldwork is very limited in terms of contact time with participants: just a matter of hours within each school, as opposed to months or years embedded within a community. This is primarily due to the practical and ethical challenges in terms of gaining access to young people under the age of 18 for extended periods of time – although it is not impossible (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016; boyd, 2014), However, it is not uncommon for ethnographers to have to modify their approach when studying participants within institutions – such as the school, in this case - due to the restrictions and limitations of access to these environments (Goffman, 1961; Davies, 1999).

This research also follows a trend within ethnography and social research for professionals working in a field to then go on to academically study the practices and groups they're already familiar with. If "finding the right question to ask is more important and sometimes more difficult than answering it", it perhaps makes sense for research questions to be 'prompted' by previous experience and observation

(Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007:25). Like other ethnographic studies, this research is not attempting to test hypotheses, rather the conclusions will aim to be 'data led', i.e. taking an inductive/iterative approach, rather than a deductive one. Data takes the form of 'field notes' made on site, a highly subjective process, where decisions "to identify certain phenomena as interesting and worthy of annotation" are almost entirely at the discretion of the researcher (Wolfinger, 2002: 87). This means reflexivity and transparency are important to highlight the perspectives and purposes of the researcher in relation to empirical observations they make in the field. That is not to say that researcher background and experiences ought to be 'separated' from findings, but researchers should be aware of how pre-existing assumptions and experiences may influence interpretations and conclusions. Essentially, 'background' or 'tacit' knowledge of the researcher should be made visible to the reader, rather than eliminated (see: Introduction chapter).

There are benefits and drawbacks to having previous experience within the environment one wishes to study, in this case within secondary schools. On the one hand, 'outsiders'/newcomers are often considered more detached, less biased, making observations that 'insiders' may not consider important, relevant or interesting. On the other, having experience working in schools makes it easier to establish trust, gain access, save time and immerse oneself in the research setting. The classroom (research environment) is familiar to both the researcher and participants in this case, which allows for a certain amount of 'cutting to the chase' (conducting the research) and less time on the foundation-laying aspects of the project (introductions, establishing trust, etc.) When ethnographers conduct research in 'new' physical or social environments, a lot of time can be spent simply adapting to etiquettes, norms, value and practices that may be otherwise alien to them ('casing the joint') (Hammersley and Atkins, 2007). Having tried and tested this particular workshop methodology in more than 50 schools previously - essentially 'piloting' the data gathering process - this somewhat reduces potential researcher anxiety surrounding the feasibility of the design, methods and approach.

Equally important is the participants' experience of the research environment (classroom). Although it is debateable whether an institution can be considered a 'natural' social environment (Goffman, 1961; Becker 2008), the school is nonetheless familiar to the young participants in this study. This is not only in physical and geographic terms, but also the classroom as a setting for learning means that the nature of the social interaction (participants being expected to discuss and respond to

stimuli examples in groups when asked to by an adult) is fairly standard and usual. Although the subject matter may be novel, the participant activities are not particularly challenging for the researcher to establish and facilitate, having previously worked in schools and by the research setting being a classroom. This role of facilitation is far closer to that of 'active participant' than 'passive observer', a factor that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. If anything, the facilitation of workshops, the gathering of data and the interaction with participants is for this particular study less challenging than simply negotiating access *prior* to entering the research environment, another factor discussed later in this chapter.

Participant observation is the standard method associated with ethnographic study, and one that is employed for this research. Atkinson and Hammersley argue "there is a sense in which *all* social research takes the form of participant observation: it involves participating in the social world, in whatever role, and reflecting on the products of that participation" (2007: 15 - my emphasis). In accepting (rather than trying to eliminate) the personal and fallible aspects of these methods of social research, a researcher is free to shift their attention from the 'nitty gritty' aspects of data gathering, towards other vital tasks of interpretation, discussion, meaning making and impact. That being said, the process nonetheless presents many methodological challenges, not least concerns around validity and bias, particularly from fellow social scientists who may be unfamiliar with these methods.

It is somewhat terrifying for a researcher about to embark on participant observation in the field to read Campos' (2015) damning comments on 'Alice Goffman's Implausible Ethnography', and the ensuing debates that followed re: the trustworthiness and reliability of ethnographers. Similarly, this quote (often attributed to Robert Solow) embodies a common fear that research that acknowledges subjectivity may be accused of then lacking in academic rigor: "Saying a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer" (quoted in Simpson, 1995: 126). The very act of 'striving for' some sense of objectivity is to some extent at odds with the epistemological beliefs underpinning the methodology and theoretical approach, which asserts that meaning is constructed, relative and fluid. The sense of a reader 'having the wool pulled over their eyes' by ethnographers is concerning, however, trust with a researcher must be established through alternative values, such as acknowledging the learning possibilities of innovative and 'messy' methodologies (Cowie, Huser and Myers, 2014). Allowing audiences an honest view of the research processes, 'warts and all', allows them to

form their own judgements and conclusions (Becker, 2008). This was one of the main influences behind the decision to include a full copy of the original 'raw' data (participants' verbatim quotations) upon which this research is based in the appendix (see: Appendix 2: Qualitative Data – Verbatim Quotes). Although this means as a researcher having to open oneself up to the possibility of alternative interpretations, comments, challenges and criticisms, this still seems preferable to possessively or protectively 'concealing' data from the reader. In this way, we qualitative researchers can perhaps hope to demonstrate our commitment to academic rigour through these radically transparent approaches. Any diversity in interpretation of meaning from the raw data therefore also tends to reinforce, rather than undermine, the interpretive epistemological stance and so is not necessarily unwelcome.

C. The researcher-tutor role

An increasingly prevalent category of ethnographic researcher is the researcher-practitioner (Wilkinson, 2000). Much like Gold's (1958) 'complete participant', this kind of research can be fully immersive, but without having to be covert, helping to combat a "sense of uneasiness" researchers may feel, either by being excluded from full involvement in the activities at the research setting or by lacking the experience or knowledge to navigate those environments effectively (Wind 2008: 81). Researchers with experience in the field as professionals are perhaps more quickly and easily able to get 'stuck in' to the work of the research, having potentially already navigated the foundational aspects of observing situational norms or building rapport (Driessen and Jansen, 2013.) This approach also challenges the stigmatizing, stereotypical image of the ethnographer doing nothing more than hanging around, taking notes, drinking coffee and chatting, potentially instead being viewed by participants and gatekeepers as a working professional (Van Maanen, 2011). Researcher-practitioners may be motivated by a desire to solve specific problems they've witnessed in their own workplaces previously, wanting to influence policy and/or shine a light on a particular issue they already have some expertise in, and this is certainly the case when it comes to this research.

There are advantages and disadvantages to facilitating a lively and interactive class with a room full of students, while simultaneously attempting to take effective and detailed research notes. The exact experience of being a researcher-tutor feels like 'sailing at once in several seas' (Geertz 1988: 77.) One major advantage is being able to somewhat control the research environment and elicit specific responses from participants (i.e. returning the focus of discussions to the subject of 'risk' online if it

veers off in unrelated direction, such as what students got up to at the weekend). Although all research is to some extent effectively 'designed' to suit the research aims and questions, by structing a workshop, creating stimuli materials, and directing the classes as a tutor, there is a sense of being able to slightly 'tailor make' the environment, and ensure at least some level of consistency across different sessions. Another benefit is the level of student engagement, participation and trust: the famous 'Hawthorne effect' is somewhat diminished by the fact that students may feel more familiar and comfortable with a 'teacher' and may not feel they are under scrutiny from a 'researcher' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Students are arguably somewhat accustomed to adults who set them group discussion tasks in class, and perhaps less so to an adult 'lurking' at the back of the room in a detached manner of pure observation (Cowie et al, 2014). Ethnographers who are concerned that participants might find it confusing if they "wore two hats simultaneously" are perhaps underestimating participants' abilities to 'go with the flow' and accept the researcher in a role that they present and perform as (Lawton, 2000: 27-28).

Participant observers tend to be used to the idea of managing multiple identities in the field, but there are serious considerations to make with regard to a hierarchy of priorities when this is the case. "Conflicts of interest and emotion between the ethnographer as authentic, related person (i.e. participant), and as exploiting researcher (i.e. observer) are…inescapable features of ethnographic method'" (Stacey, 1988: 23). Thankfully, in the case of working with under 18 year olds, the NSPCC code of conduct simply eliminates the need for anxiety about research aims: children *must be* prioritized above the researcher or the research itself. Additionally, the potential 'exploitative' aspect of research is minimised by offering the researcher up as an 'expert tutor' in a particular field, with clear educational benefits to students who participate in sessions. Youth research in particular has long advocated research that involves a fairer exchange of knowledge and expertise between researchers and participants, even urging for research to be constructed as a collaborative project where the dichotomy between the two roles dissolves (Chin, 2007; Raby, 2007; Cowie et al. 2014.) The researcher-tutor role allows an acknowledgement of researcher and the participants both as 'experts' in their own fields, exchanging knowledge and adhering to the values and commitment to 'youth-focused' research.

Not all power relations are easy to eliminate, however, and there are additional imbalances created when a researcher assumes the role of 'teacher' and the young participants 'students'. Authority during sessions and the ability to command attention

are somewhat necessary if the workshop is to be effective for research *or* for education, meaning that additional skills or experience may be beneficial to researchers within schools. But while the traditional, formal set up of the 'classroom' and those roles of 'tutor' and 'student' may be imbalanced in terms of power, there are ethical issues for adult researchers who attempt to seek 'equal insider' status with teenagers. This is particularly highlighted by Pascoe's research into constructs of masculinity among high-school age boys (2007). She describes feeling awkward about being unable to challenge inappropriate language and behaviour (towards her, and other children), for fear of losing her status as 'one of the boys', which was vital to her access for observational research. In maintaining authority and control as an adult, researchers must ultimately also maintain responsibility, allowing them to uphold commitments to safeguarding and role modelling (these issues are discussed in more detail under 'Ethics' later in this chapter.)

D. Methods

The method of data gathering employed for this research combines aspects of participant-observation, focus group, and interview, using a model tried and tested through several months of professional practice. This involved facilitating workshops within secondary school classes, lasting approximately one hour in length, with roughly 16-30 pupils of the same age/year group in each class. A member of staff was always present in an observational capacity, but the sessions were almost entirely facilitated by the researcher. Each workshop was structured as follows:

- Researcher introduction and explanation of the research aims
- Student consent forms distributed and signed, plus opportunity for participants to ask any questions about the research or withdraw
- Class divided into six groups (between 2-5 pupils each)
- Each group given two stimuli example social media posts to discuss
- Instructed to specifically consider and discuss what 'risk' they felt was involved in sending/publishing this content, according to four traffic light categories representing criminal, civil, social or no risk (see below)
- Researcher goes around each group in turn, asking what they think, and making handwritten verbatim notes of quotes from pupils (and noting how many times each category was mentioned), plus any additional observational notes on behaviour that seem relevant (e.g. laughing). This aspect forms around 30 minutes of the overall session.

- The researcher closes group discussions and asks each group to 'report back' to the whole class their categorisations and the rationale behind this, opening up the opportunity for broader discussion (notes were generally not made during this aspect of the workshop, as the focus had shifted to educational aspects).
- After each example is read out and pupils' have discussed their views, the researcher-tutor explains what level of risk could/should be associated with the example, and a bit of context about the related law(s). Any questions relating to communication law can be asked and addressed at this point.
- Finally, pupils are invited to take the researchers' card with contact details (provided by the University in line with ethical guidelines) and an information sheet with sources of support (e.g. Childline, ThinkUKnow etc.) at the end of the session.

The categories of risk were explained as follows, and the traffic light colours/descriptions (in bold) were pinned to the front of the class on the board, or given as printed handouts to each group, as a reminder during the discussions:

- **Red = Criminal Risk** ('something that might get you in trouble with the police, arrested or even sent to prison')
- **Orange = Civil Risk** ('something that might get you taken to court and sued; this is where you have to pay someone money as part of saying sorry for something you did or said, can be very expensive')
- **Yellow = Social Risk** ('something that wouldn't get you arrested or sued, but might get you in trouble, maybe with your school, your job, your family or friends – or harm your reputation')
- **Green = No Risk** ('something that's fine, not a problem to post')

The research aims are to investigate perceptions of criminal, legal and social boundaries, and so the use of categories helps to focus discussions around this. In relation to potential criminal risks, the influence for the examples stemmed from the Crown Prosecution Service's guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media (2018). Examples of potentially libellous messages, breaches of privacy or copyright offences were also included to represent civil risks. All the posts, including those representing potential social risks, were fictional inventions from the researcher, but many inspired by real life cases (e.g. those discussed by Ronson, 2015, or CPS 2018) Not all of the examples are 'clear-cut', allowing room for interpretation and discussion among student participants.

Examples were labelled A-L to help with the process of making field notes, and intended to represent a broad range potential issues relating to the law and ethics of social media communications (see Fig. G: Table of stimuli example posts). The rationale and relevant legislation behind the design of each example post will be discussed in more detail, where relevant, within the analysis sections (Chapter 3 onwards), as context within which to consider participants' assessment of the risks.

Figure G: Table of example stimuli posts for discussion (A-L)

Post	Content	Potential risks
A	*"Gurkhas are filth who deserve to be shot. They don't wash, they lie, they abuse their kids and don't work. GET THEM OUT OF ALDERSHOT"*	Racist hate speech – material inciting hatred/violence on grounds of nationality Threatening/menacing
B	*"I'M SO UPSET I WANT TO DIE! This will NEVER happen again :,(Why, Zayn, WHY?!!! (pic from @BBCNews)"* [photograph of One Direction band]	Copyright issues re: photographic image Sensitive subject matter
C	*"I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say not then it's her own fault for getting raped"*	Justifying rape, sensitive subject matter, misogynistic/sexist
D	*"Massive delays @HeathrowAirport. If they don't get it sorted in the next fifteen minutes….. BOOM!!!!!!"*	Threatening/menacing communication (not explicit)
E	*"I'm sick to death of ******ing dykes round here! I swear I'm gonna smack the next one I see in the face!"*	Homophobic hate speech – material inciting hatred/violence on the grounds of sexual orientation Threatening/menacing communication

Figure G (cont.): Table of example stimuli posts for discussion (A-L)		
F	"Waiting at the gates for my little friend. This time he won't even be able to walk once I'm finished"	Threatening/menacing communication Targeting individual: Harassment (not explicit)
G	"*You gotta watch this video of Alice. What a massive slut! Youtube.com"*	Distributing indecent images of under 18s Targeting individual: Harassment Private, sexual images shared with intent to cause humiliation Misogynistic/sexist
H	*"Peter: You are GAY. Everyone knows you love men, don't you?"*	Targeting individual: Harassment Private subject matter (sexuality) Homophobic
I	"Jenny is a right slag. She loves giving it out. Especially to Mr. Sanders in the French classroom afterschool."	Identifying alleged child sex victim Identifying teacher accused of crimes against pupil Defamation (if untrue) Misogynistic/sexist
J	"Beyonce is nothing but an ugly, black slut. She should just *****ing jump off a building."	Targeting individual: Harassment Racial element – aggravating/motivating
K	"Collingwood College is an absolute dump. Anyone who sends their kids there is basically guilty of child neglect"	Social/reputation risk
L	"Ah, ******. Got double science first thing. On a monster hangover. #LifeSucks"	Social/reputation risk

Due to offensive nature of some of the examples, students, parents and teachers were given advanced content warnings, sources of support and a reiteration of the voluntary nature of participation. The use of stimuli examples (similar to 'vignettes') to prompt discussion is a common aspect of research methods with children (Jennifer and Cowie, 2012; Barbovschi, Green and Vandoninck, 2013; Talwar et al., 2014; Shariff, 2015). There are both practical and ethical arguments for allowing participants to discuss potentially controversial subject matter without having to draw upon personal experience to make judgements or explain their viewpoints. By de-personalizing subject matter, young participants can discuss issues from a "non-personal and therefore less threatening perspective", which is especially useful when it relates to 'risk taking' behaviours (Hughes, 1998: 383; Austen, 2009). This methodology has been utilised and discussed by other qualitative researchers interested in investigating subjects such as abortion and sexting (Whitaker, 2002; Phippen, 2012). Discussions can remain somewhat in the realm of the hypothetical while also allowing for personal stories to emerge if participants feel comfortable to share them. This does result in varying - even contradictory – viewpoints to be expressed by different participants, but these are also important aspects of the data: "These contradictions are not a result of [participants] lying or giving false advice but are a product of shifting perspectives…. Multiple viewpoints, or poly-vocality" (O'Dell, Crafter, Abreu and Cline, 2012: 712). The use of vignettes, or stimuli examples, are prescriptive in terms of content, but not *context*, allowing for participants to imagine additional aspects of the scenario that may affect the risk. This 'imagining' or 'constructing' of contextual information influencing risk factors is a central aspect of the data discussed within the analysis chapters, as the same behaviours were sometimes considered to have different levels of risk depending on circumstances.

Many academic studies with young people also stress the need for research with young people to be 'youth-led', emphasising the benefits of focus groups, participant observation or Participant Action Research (PAR) methods in order to de-individualise participants (e.g. Livingstone and Sefton-Greer, 2016; Betts and Spenser, 2017; Bailey and Steeves, 2015; Shariff, 2015; boyd, 2014; Ringrose et al, 2012). This research aims to adhere to principles for participatory methods of research with young people, including use of methods and settings that are familiar to children's daily lives (e.g. the school classroom), giving students the chance to be 'active participants' (e.g. asking them to share their viewpoints), allowing them to be interviewed in groups, to co-construct meaning and equalize power imbalance with the researcher, use of vignettes (or in this case stimuli examples) to elicit responses

rather than being forced to discuss their own behaviours, and – last, but by no means least - making the research experience interactive, enjoyable and engaging (Cowie et al, 2014) . This research also seeks to employ the perspective of 'critical respect' with regard to participants' responses, meaning that their accounts are taken seriously, while understanding that these are formed within particular social and cultural contexts (Gill, 2007).

E. Data gathering

Data was gathered throughout the research process, but with very different purposes in mind. Certain aspects of the data were somewhat 'fixed' or indisputable, such as recording the number of participants in each group, which examples were provided as stimuli, and what year group participants were in. Other aspects were far more interpretive, such as the gender of participants[12], observational behaviour notes (such as emotional expression), and the notes made in the researcher's reflexive journal after each session (while these do strictly not form part of the data being analysed for the purposes of this study, they nonetheless form a part of the research process and the formation of ideas influencing the findings). This process to some degree combines 'comprehensive' and 'salient' approaches to ethnographic note taking in the field, depending on the type of data being gathered (Emerson, Fredz and Shaw, 1995).

It is well documented that the presence of the researcher impacts the responses and behaviour of participants (also known as the 'Hawthorne effect'), leading some sociologists to interpret speech, behaviour and interaction as performances (Goffman, 1990). This was a major factor in the decision to take handwritten notes in the field, rather than rely on recording equipment to capture participant responses. Previous professional experience as both a journalist and an education practitioner have revealed how, when a microphone is brought into a classroom, young people tend to either 'play up' (wanting to dominate and perform for the mic) or 'shut up' (becoming self-conscious and refusing to speak). The handwritten 'head notes' or 'scratch notes' taken in the field, consisting of verbatim quotes of students' responses, plus any salient comments, observations or initial analysis, therefore formed the basis of my data (Emerson et al. 1995). Although some could argue that the accuracy and detail of handwritten notes may be inferior, the reality is that the presence of microphones or video would be too obstructive to the research process to ensure useful data were

[12] See 'The Fallacy of Assignable Gender' for further discussion (Bradford, 2007).

recorded. Besides, ethnographers are encouraged to "resist the very ready temptation to try and see, hear and participate in everything that goes on", and so use of the researcher as a selective, filtering tool to record only what is deemed most relevant is potentially quite useful at the data gathering stage (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 37).

The structured, almost rigidly ordered approach to note taking within the workshops has been essential to keep on track of the data during the research process. It is easy to empathise with O'Reilly's (2009) description of the chaotic experience of running a research discussion class with 30 14-year-olds. Lareau (1996) also notes the disastrous consequences of failing to keep up note writing while conducting field work in schools. Adhering to advice from Emerson (1983: 91) to try to attend to the "rhythms" of the class session, notes were kept in temporal order, using a clear cataloguing system and a shorthand code (e.g. use of square brackets to distinguishing observations from quotes). Preliminary notes made in the field were written up in full form later the same day, along with more detailed complete notes, while the memories from the session were still 'fresh' (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Lofland and Lofland, 1984; Goffman, 1989; Emerson et al. 1995.) Sometimes additions were made to the notes in the driver's seat of the car in the school car park immediately after sessions, for fear that even in the few hours' drive home, key material would 'fade' from memory.

Initially, there was a lot of internal deliberation as to whether to gather data on identity aspects of the young participants (e.g. socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, gender, etc.) particularly due to the relevance of this to risk perceptions, according to the literature (Chapter 1). Given that the only reliable, fair and accurate way to assess this be through self-completed participant surveys, and that this would likely need to be completed during the time allocated for workshop sessions, it was a challenging problem to consider. The addition of survey data gathering would undoubtedly eat into the limited time allocated for field notes and verbatim quotes. The need to develop expertise in new methodologies was also a concern. Particularly with notions of class, there is dispute among social researchers as how to best assess this. I was unsure on whether I ought to enquire about parental occupation(s), parental education level, household income, as well as being concerned that not all students would necessarily even be able to provide this information. As such, I decided that description information ought to be noted about the schools that participated and the overall makeup of the pupils instead. While this potentially limits the potential for

analysis in relation to marginalisation and risk, it allowed for more detailed notes on student interactions, which was the primary focus of this study.

The question of participant gender was more difficult one to address. On the one hand, it is generally acknowledged that 'observing' gender is hugely problematic due to participants' right to self-identify as trans, intersex, or gender neutral, and/or participants who may present as gender non-conforming (Bradford, 2007; Macdonald, 2013). However, failing to include gender also presented a research problem. Single gender focus groups are considered useful when exploring sexual practices and activities within school (Allen, 2004). Also, there is some evidence that girls tend to hold back and let boys take the lead during mixed group discussions (Shucksmith and Henry, 1998). There have been calls for more research to explore how topics such as sexting could be discussed and framed differently within mixed gender groups versus single-sex groups (Ringrose et al, 2012). In addition, issues such as 'sexting' and 'revenge pornography' - (see: example post G) - are inescapably linked to gender inequalities, making a 'gender blind' researcher lens illogical (Salter, 2017). For these reasons, I took note of what I 'observed' to be the gender presented (boys or girls), while acknowledging that this, like much of the observational field notes, is highly interpretive and subjective, and open to challenge.

2.2. Logistics and Ethics

a. Recruitment, strategy and sampling

As highlighted by Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) in their introduction to 'The Class' (a year long ethnographic project exploring children's digital lives), the UK education system has become increasingly complicated, made up from a mixture of potential overlapping categories: free schools, faith schools, academies, independent schools, single-sex schools, grammar schools etc. This diversity makes the very concept of 'sampling' a range of schools almost impossible. Nonetheless, initially this research intended to approach and engage with roughly 20 secondary schools, which at the time was not considered entirely unrealistic, having previously delivered sessions in more than 40 schools within one academic year. The initial plan was to recruit new schools from different areas with no pre-existing connections. However, it became clear that this would be a drain on an ethnographer's most precious resource (time), plus it became apparent that utilising existing social and professional connections is something that many qualitative and ethnographic researchers openly discuss the benefits (and often necessity) of (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002; Best, 2007;

Austen, 2009; Barbovschi et al., 2013 Cowie et al. 2014). Strategies for recruitment involved creating and maintaining an up to date database of potential schools, contact details, relevant staff, and latest correspondence, while simultaneously developing an open-access website with detailed information about the study (citycyberresearch.com) for teachers, parents and pupils.

Scale and sampling are areas that ethnographic research is often criticized for, as researchers must trade-off between breadth and depth when it comes to their enquiries. Common concerns include homogeneity of participants, lack of diversity or representativeness, convenience sampling etc. all contributing to lack of statistical generalisibility. The decision to scale down the size of this research project was partly influenced by conducting a review of the literature and a realisation that empirical studies with similar research aims and design tended to engage with small sample sizes, often fewer than 50 participants within perhaps only one or two institutions (Ringrose et al, 2012; Shariff, 2015; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016; Salter, 2017). The other influence on this decision was necessity; 35 email exchanges with contacts in schools resulted in five 'hot leads' (schools expressing an interest and willingness to participate) with follow up meetings on-site. The first initial research workshop booked (in December 2015) resulted in nullified data, as the school had neglected to obtain consent forms from the parents of the pupils allocated to take part. Frustratingly, this problem was only drawn to my attention after arriving to deliver the sessions. Later in the process, another school admitted the day before the workshop was scheduled that fewer than 10 of the several dozen pupils booked to participate had returned completed consent forms from parents. Fortunately, after the first successful day of research workshops was completed, it became apparent that the amount of data from even just one school would probably be sufficient for the level of analysis required for this PhD project. The total final sample consists of 184 participants, within nine workshops, across a range of age groups, from two schools (see Fig. H: Sampling breakdown):

Fig. H: Sampling breakdown		
School	**Year group (& age in years)**	**Pupils (& gender)**
SB	Year 7 (11-12)	15 (4B+11G)
BH	Year 7 (11-12)	25 (11B+14G)
SB	Year 8 (12-13)	22 (8B+14G)
BH	Year 8 (12-13)	22 (10B+12G)
BH	Year 9 (13-14)	28 (17B+19G)
BH	Year 10 (14-15)	24 (10B+14G)
BH	Year 12s (16-17)	14 (6B+8G)
SB	Year 13s (17-18)	20 (14B+6G)
BH	Year 13s (17-18)	14 (4B+10G)
	TOTAL	**184**

One of the major drawbacks of using existing contacts for sampling is that the resulting groups tend not to be very representative or diverse (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). In the case of this study, there is a broader concern with regard to the fact that the schools sampled have previously benefitted from educational assemblies relating to social media law and ethics, and there is no way of knowing which of the sampled pupils were present for those. This means that the knowledge and perceptions of risk expressed within the workshops have potentially been influenced or informed by previous presentations. In this sense, it cannot be claimed that the sample represents 'typical' or generic perspectives on risk among young people. That being said (as the diversity of results in the analysis chapters show), the very concept of a 'general' or 'typical' viewpoint among young people is a bit of a fallacy anyway, as children are not a homogenous group with a consensus of perspectives. In addition, some participants inferred how other factors outside of education (such as news media) had influenced their understandings of risk, highlighting that the very concept of 'clean' data on youth perceptions is a myth. Although the sample of young people for this research could be argued to have benefitted from additional knowledge about social media law prior to the workshop, Lupton (2013) reminds us that risk judgements are perspectives are not based upon straightforward 'rational risk knowledge', but situated within cultural, social, moral and emotional contexts. Arguably, there is still a lot that can be learned from analysing discussions with these groups of young people.

The participants in this research have been anonymised in line with ethical guidelines to protect their confidentiality, and the schools are not named in the thesis. However, some contextual information is useful to situate the experiences and perspectives of the children within their educational, social and cultural contexts. One of the schools that participated is a secondary school with academy status; with roughly 1,300 mixed gender pupils, aged 11-18. This school is in an urban major conurbation, with about 6% of pupils eligible for free school meals and rated 'Good' by Ofsted at the time of research. The other school is a comprehensive secondary school of religious character; with roughly 1,700 mixed gender pupils, aged 11-18. This school is in an urban city and town, with about 3% of pupils eligible for free school meals and was rated 'Good' by Ofsted at the time of research. Both schools were located in the South of England and are not hugely dissimilar to one another. Further key defining features of each school have been deliberately omitted from the final thesis.

b. Costs, practical considerations and resources:

The costs of undertaking this research were relatively low, with the major practical consideration being travel to and from the school locations. Advantages such as having a clean driving licence and reimbursement from the university for car hire services were essential. The only major resource required for the sessions were paper and printing, with each workshop requiring an enormous amount of accompanying organisational paperwork (i.e. Ethical Approval confirmation letter from the university; an FAQ 'prompt' sheet to help explain the research to participants; a copy of the letter for schools/parents explaining the research in more depth; certificate proving Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks; NSPCC certificate indicating child protection and safeguarding awareness training; several copies of 'further sources of support' sheets for participants; several blank consent forms for participants; a blank consent form for the schools; 12 example posts for the workshop; printed out traffic lights with risk categories; forms for the researcher to complete re: makeup of the class/groups; confirmation of the workshop times and details, with staff contact details, address and phone number of the school; blank forms for field notes; university business cards with contact details, etc.)

Additional requirements include spreadsheets of data for access and logistics. Namely, this includes school contact details, workshop information, typed up field notes, diary notes and calendars of meetings and workshops, reflexive researcher journal entries, etc. For this project, there were literally hundreds of consent forms to organize, file and keep securely stored (two for each of the 184 participating pupils –

one parental, one personal – then one per school as well). The amount of rigorous planning, communication and organisation required to undertake this kind of research simply cannot (and must not) be underestimated. In hindsight, it is completely obvious as to why many researchers in this area may choose to use online survey methodology when researching similar topics with young people. As previously alluded to, the most invaluable resource for ethnographic enquiry is, undoubtedly, time (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

c. Access, gatekeeping and consent

The notion of trust in research relationships is vital to overcoming initial challenges of access when studying groups, including with gatekeepers as much as participants (Oakley, 1981; Goffman, 2009). Pre-existing professional connections with school staff were not so much a desirable advantage as a genuine necessity, with potential concerns relating to trust or competence essentially already addressed. An unexpected side effect of this, however, was additional feelings of emotional investment and labour, on both sides. For example, staff expressed enormous feelings of guilt if workshops had to be moved or cancelled, with me then feeling it necessary to manage those negative emotions, provide reassurance, and even take on reciprocal feelings of guilt for burdening (already overstretched) teaching staff with the logistical nightmare of organising research workshops. The deliberate mutually beneficial 'win-win' aspect of combining education and research for workshops at times led to 'lose-lose' feeling of mutual guilt and disappointment if the workshops were not able to go ahead as planned.

The notion of combined benefit to researcher, participants and gatekeepers was key when negotiating physical and temporal 'access'. Oakley (1981) stresses that all researcher-participant relationships ought to be reciprocal, and this is potentially also the case for researcher-gatekeeper relationships. Teachers explicitly expressed that the benefits of previous educational workshops was the reason they were 'happy to help' with organising my research sessions. At times, there was a sense of delicate power-balance and negotiation with staff gatekeepers (Cowie et al, 2014); with additional educational services (such as parents' evening presentations) requested as 'part of the deal' in exchange for teachers re-organising student timetables and ensuring parental consent forms would be returned. One of the most challenging aspects to navigate was the varying degrees of organisation and commitment demonstrated by the schools throughout the research process. Last minute changes and cancellations were common, as was a lack of sufficient number of returned and

signed parental consent forms. In this sense, the school represents a gatekeeper to *parents' and guardians'* consent, as much as the participating pupils. On the part of the researcher, it seemed at times as if there was little bargaining power besides withdrawing the offer of the educational workshops, which ultimately would've been a disadvantage to everyone involved.

The extent to which parents provided informed consent for their children to participate in this study is a complete unknown. Consent was represented simply as a completed and signed consent form returned to the school, and not a single parent emailed the researcher to either ask questions about the study or to retrospectively withdraw consent. As such, it was vital to ensure pupils were given the opportunity to individually and personally consent to participate, and have their right to withdraw explained as per UNCRC guidance. Student consent forms were designed using clear and simple language while trying to avoid seeming patronising (hence they were labelled 'student', not 'child', which older teenagers might particularly object to). Ten minutes were allocated at the start of each workshop to outline research aims, the voluntary nature of participation, the researcher's safeguarding responsibilities and provide an opportunity to answer any questions from participants. Most student consent forms were signed without hesitation or questions, which was also quite interesting to note. There was often a lot of excitement shown by younger students when asked to consider the decision entirely for themselves and sign their name on a document to consent, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

d. Child protection, safeguarding and disclosures:

Issues relating to child protection, safeguarding and disclosures are an essential ethical consideration for researchers working with children, especially on sensitive subject matter, and yet detailed ethical discussion of this aspect is often absent from research methodologies. This may be because child protection procedures, narratives and authoritative approaches (i.e. from police and schools) have been problematised within the literature on children's digital rights, risks and responsibilities (e.g. Barnard-Wills, 2012; Gabriel, 2014; Salter, 2017). In some ways, it could be argued that these bureaucratic processes and procedures are underpinned by the same 'at-risk', protectionist approaches to managing childhood that this study also seeks to critique (Kitzinger, 1988; Lubeck and Garrett, 1990; Jackson and Scott, 1999). However, this is no excuse for vague or brief discussion of this key aspect of research ethics and so, in line with the research values outlined at the start of this chapter, transparency is essential.

Previous professional experience had highlighted the likelihood for potential disclosures to arise from these workshop sessions, particularly as subjects such as online abuse, sexual imagery, abuse allegations, rape, and hate speech all feature as part of the stimuli example post content. It is important to firstly emphasise that this is not a negative thing, nor should it intimidate or dissuade researchers from exploring these difficult topics with children. The process of 'bringing to light' that which was previously unknown or hidden is a positive process undertaken by many doing social research in one way or another. Children's negative experiences do not cease to exist simply because we remain unaware of them, though it may be reassuring to think so. Equally, a youth-led or child-centred approach ceases to be so if either a researcher's ambition for the 'success' of their research, or discomfort at the exploration of taboo subject matter, are anything other than of secondary concern to young participants' safety and wellbeing.

The ethical and safeguarding responsibilities of this study began prior to any contact with child participants, by completing an NSPCC-certified online child protection training course and undergoing full DBS background checks. Staff, parents and pupils were all informed prior to the workshops that any suspected child protection concerns or disclosures would mean that the school would be informed. This was explained both in writing and (for the pupils) reiterated in person on the day of the workshops. Generally, the Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP) at the schools was someone who was either already known to me, or someone who I had previously been in contact with. While no disclosures were made during the research workshops, previous experience meant that a clear process of reporting was familiar. This step-by-step process involves:

1: Making a mental note of the concern, remembering exact words or phrase used if possible;
2: Arranging for the student to discuss this further at the end of the session;
3: Request that the teacher/DSP also listen, and ask the student for more clarification/detail with the teacher present;
4: This essentially constitutes the 'reporting' of a concern to the school, but best practice might involve an email follow up with the teacher to ensure there is a formal record that the concerns were raised.

When outlined in writing and presented as a series of formal stages, this process may look interrogative. However, it is important to remember that a researcher's tone,

expression and demeanour throughout ought to reassure, rather than alarm the young person involved, who (based on previous experience) may not even be aware that their experience is a serious child protection concern. Verbal reassurances can also help ('you don't need to worry'; 'you've not done anything wrong'; 'you're not in trouble' etc). In addition, efforts should be made at all times within schools, or when in professional direct contact with children, to adhere to the personal code of conduct outlined by the NSPCC, re: role-modelling and safeguarding behaviours. This includes appropriate and professional behaviour and use of language; prioritizing children; not giving out personal contact details; not being solely responsible for children; reporting any concerns about child safety to the DSP, etc. Although the research workshops are not intended to cause discomfort, the nature of the subject matter means that there was a possibility for some participants to feel awkward, confused or concerned either during or after the workshop, because of something that has been raised. As such, the following steps were taken specifically while on site to minimise the potential harm caused to participants:

- Bringing along the DBS checks and child-safeguarding training certification to the school, plus the university ethical approval letter.
- Explicitly reiterating that all participation is voluntary and that if students wish to withdraw from the research process, at any point, they can.
- Ensuring that a member of school staff is always within the room during the research to, if necessary, speak one-on-one with a student or take them outside if they need a break or wish to leave.
- Paying attention during the workshop to any signs that students may be feeling uncomfortable/awkward, asking questions, checking if students are okay or not, and if necessary highlighting concerns to a relevant member of staff on hand.
- Providing the school and students with information about where to find further advice or seek help with any of the issues arising from the workshops.
- Ensure that any child protection concerns are immediately referred to the school's DSP or a relevant member of staff.

It is important to also note that, based on previous professional experience, almost all of the participants will have experience using handheld internet-enable devices and be registered with social networking sites by the time they reach secondary school (Powell-Jones, 2018). As such, it is unlikely that any of the example posts given during the sessions would be more shocking or distressing than content pupils would have already viewed by this age. Even if this were the case, the familiarity of the

school environment, the tutor facilitated discussions, the voluntary nature of the class, the opportunity for questions, and the educational explanation of the risks of each of the examples ought to have helped minimise the potential for harm to young participants from reading the posts.

e. Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection

Participants, parents and schools were assured of student confidentiality through anonymity at the data collection stage of the research, as only age group and gender were included in the researcher's notes from the session. Quotations are essentially 'un-attributable' to specific individuals. The only indication of participants' identities is the names written on consent forms, which are stored in a locked filing cabinet. The two participating schools are not referred to by name anywhere within the research. Descriptions of the pupil makeup are included, but not to the extent that a reader might be able to identify specifically which schools were involved with the research. In line with the university data protection policies, the data will be held on record (securely, i.e. password-protected in digital format or locked storage for paperwork) for ten years. One final interesting aspect to note is the students' occasional *distress* that they were anonymous within the final research, as many expressed a keen wish to be identified by name in the final publication. This is a curious consideration for future research, especially since they are asserted to be 'co-creators' of this work: "Children can do and produce knowledge that is worth paying attention to exactly because it is not the sort of knowledge we produce ourselves" (Chin, 2007: 272). Perhaps in future there will be a way to balance the right to remove/anonymise, with the right to accreditation, if requested by young participants.

2.3. Project Development

A. Amendments to the research design after pilots

The following adjustments were made to the initial workshop approach and design after conducting a series of six pilot sessions with two schools prior to the research, based on researcher's reflexive notes:

Ensure to always arrive early to a school (ideally 15 minutes early), as being stuck in traffic and running late creates 'panic' before the sessions. Preparation and organisation ahead of the workshops is vital, as classes were often chaotic, started late and overran, involving a 'quick turnaround' of students. Being prepared for all sessions well in advance, as there was little or no preparation time between classes.

Keeping a list of everything that needs to be mentioned prior to the workshop and ticking each item off from a list when complete (e.g. introduction, explaining research aims, highlighting voluntary nature of participation, mentioning anonymity, mentioning safeguarding procedure, distributing consent forms etc.) This was especially useful when running several workshops 'back-to-back', as it can be easy to forget one of these vital things. Being able to authoritatively 'take charge' of a class was important, as students often talked over each other, or even walked around during to go and see friends sitting across the room during the session. Outlining clear 'ground rules' at the start, and not being afraid to instruct students in the same way that a teacher would, helped to manage these situations.

Trying to create a more structured session to ensure consistency/comparability between sessions also helped. This meant including fewer examples (12 maximum), smaller focus groups (five pupils maximum), allocating longer time for discussion and to record data temporally, in order (i.e. A-L). Cultural references (celebrities) were changed to try to remain relevant. Previous examples included mention of Michael Gove, Robbie Williams, Holly Willoughby, and The Rolling Stones, which caused some discussions to go off track, as many of these figures were unknown to many of the students. Instead, I included more examples of potential peer-to-peer victimisation alongside examples directed as strangers or celebrities, as existing research suggests the target of online victimization may affect how the conduct is perceived in terms of acceptability (Pyzalski, 2012). I needed to ensure posts were short and simple in terms of language, while still allowing for potential ambiguity in terms of meaning and interpretation. Posts that were 'too obvious' mean student discussions were very short, while ones that were too complicated or detailed led to discussions that were too long or irrelevant. Also, I added increased emphasis on clarifying the traffic light categories, which had previously been misunderstood at times. A simple brief verbal overview of the categories at the start of the session and checking that everyone understood was an easy way to help this.

Finally, it was vital to make an effort to pay attention, listen and question throughout, even though I had a lot of previous experience running these sessions. It is important as a researcher not take anything for granted, and aim to become fully immersed in the students' perspective and viewpoint, *as if* hearing them for the very first time. Unlike the final research workshops, the pilot sessions did result in a number of disclosures, and so it was vital to ensure that I was completely clear on the procedure for reporting these in a way that prioritised child safety while not disadvantaging the

process of data-gathering (hence the four-step guide, p88). Typing up verbatim 'scratch notes' and more detailed 'complete notes', plus journaling reflexive notes, as soon as possible after the workshop was hugely important, as even a break of just a few hours resulted in aspects 'slipping' from the memory.

B. Data analysis

Concerns surrounding accuracy, validity, bias and trust within ethnographic research were partly what led to the decision to gather verbatim quotations from participants. It is also hoped that in some way this helps to 'give voice' to young participants: rather than assuming a subjective interpretation of students' words at the point of data-collection, allowing the participants' words to 'speak for themselves' and the researcher to re-examine them in their (near) original form repeatedly over time (Green, 2013). Woodson (2007: 301) argues "all research with and on childhood should attempt to bring the youth voice into public/adult spaces", and verbatim quotes are one way to try and do this. Equally, researchers must accept that they too are part of the data, even the methods involve mostly observation and minimal participation (Agar 2004). In the process of 'writing up' of notes, student quotations and researcher observations are distinguished by squared brackets, and the use of underlining helps to indicate where there had been verbal emphasis upon a word or phrase (Fig. I):

Fig. I: Example of quotations/field notes in typed format
(See Appendix 2 for full 'raw' data)

Post F: "Waiting at the gates for my little friend. This time he won't even be able to walk once I'm finished"	[R] Also threatening. [O] Orange? [said like a question] Not actually saying it to his face. But they are waiting? Saying it, but not going to do it. [R] Cause they're actually there and waiting. Also "this time" so it's not the first time [they've done this]. [R] If police did arrest them, they might have to investigate why [they said it] 'cause there might be a reason. 'Little friend' sounds like an older person towards a younger person. Like they're going to beat them up badly [R]. [O] You don't know if they're joking or not, but you could sue anyway so [O]. [O] or [Y]. Don't know what they're <u>actually</u> saying.

Similar to Lupton and Tulloch (2002: 322), analytic emphasis for this research is on "key themes, narratives, definitions, discourses … emerging from the [data]". Using broad thematic analysis (as opposed to detailed discourse analysis) allows for potentially multiple interpretations of large amounts of qualitative data, with a primary interest in repetitions of words or themes, or emerging patterns and trends, rather than linguistics. As is so obviously the case with ethnography, the initial stages of 'interpreting data' begin at the data gathering stage, through choosing where to focus researcher attention, followed by the process of typing up the data into a digital format later the same day. The non-linear nature of social research and interpretation makes attempting to retrospectively reflect upon meaning-making processes tricky: "trying to recount such analysis, as if it were a step-by-step process, is extremely difficult… Much of it occurred through continually writing, re-reading and re-writing chapters" (Rayment 2011:112). Again, this is another reason to aim for (potentially brutal) honesty as a way of building trust in one's methods, rather than attempting to construct a narrative of perfection.

Use of participatory methods when researching the experiences of children and young people often produces data as that is "messy" "chaotic" and "overwhelming", one reason why they may remain "marginal to mainstream research" (Cowie et al., 2014:63). The benefits of being able to utilise an inductive, evidence-based approach to research findings, and having a rich and detailed a data set, were the major motivations that justified the challenges and commitment associated with these methods of research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, seeing the data in its original 'raw' form then presented a challenge of organisation as much as anything else, similar to the management of the 'chaos' in the classroom being the primary concern during the data gathering stages. The approach to data analysis was generally iterative; meaning a lot of time was focused upon reading and re-reading (and *re*-reading) through the data, and then attempting to make theoretical conclusions by returning to the literature. Initial attempts at data organisation involved (an admittedly somewhat crude) use of coloured pens, underlining each time a risk category were mentioned in the relevant colour (i.e. red, orange, yellow or green).

This rough 'quantification' (or 'colourification') of the data allowed primary analysis to examine how many times each category had been mentioned by each group in response to each example. This data was then re-organised according to the risk categories used, and cross referenced with the age of the groups, and then again according to example posts (A-L). Conclusions could start to be made from the data,

such as ‘younger students being more likely to rate content as criminally risky, whereas older students tended to use the lower risk categories more’ or ‘Post D generated the most consensus on risk, while post G generated the most disagreement and diversity’. Responses could also then be compared across groups according to the same stimuli posts A-L. From this, repeated words or phrases among student responses could be more easily identified, and recurring themes begin to emerge from the data. Initial coding resulted in more than twenty different ‘themes’, but it was only by revisiting the literature that these could be more suitably grouped together, or merged as part of over-arching theme. This iterative process can be imaged in terms of moving very ‘close’ to the data (re-reading and organising quotes) and then gaining symbolic ‘distance’ (returning to the theory and themes within the literature), as a way of developing ideas.

The greatest challenge after having identified clear themes was then organising the discussions into analysis chapter drafts. Having struggled and failed over time to group themes into overarching ‘umbrella’ topics, the most useful solution seemed to be to imagine pseudo ‘stages of risk analysis’ in terms of a chronological order. This breakthrough was inspired by the advice given to ethnographers to focus on *temporal* note taking when overwhelmed by data in the field (Emerson, 1983). It is important to be clear: these stages do *not* reflect participants’ actual processes in a literal sense, as risk interpretations were rarely ordered and logical. Rather, it is a useful conceptualisation of chronology by the researcher in order to assist the organisation and understanding of a somewhat ‘messy’ dataset. These stages and themes are organised as follows:

1: Labelling, judgement and meaning i.e. ‘What is in the post?’ ‘What does it say/what is it doing?’ ‘How do I feel?’ ‘What does it mean?’ ‘How do we label this?’

2: Relationships, power, proximity and status i.e. ‘Who is posting this? Who is it directed at/Who is it about?’ ‘What is the nature of their relationship?’ ‘Will it harm?’

3: Justifications and neutralisations: i.e. ‘What are the circumstances around this post?’ ‘Why might someone send this?’ ‘Where does responsibility/blame lie?’ ‘What defences or justifications could there be?’ ‘Is there really anything wrong with it?’

4: Imagining consequences: ‘What might the impact of this message be?’ ‘Who would formally or informally sanction this, and how?’ ‘What would be the affect on others?’ ‘Would there be any consequences at all?’

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the arguments for an interpretative approach to undertaking research, and how interactionist and social constructivist ideology from the theoretical frameworks have been developed into the research design and methodology for this study. Ethnographic and youth-centred methodologies present various challenges – logistically, ethically and practically – and these have been acknowledged and addressed where possible. Overall, I have argued that the advantages and opportunities for a rich and detailed data set, plus the benefits to participants in an educational sense, outweigh the challenges of this somewhat unusual 'workshop' method of conducting research in schools.

In the empirical chapters than follow, I will explore the findings from the research in the order outlined above, using both theoretical writings on the sociology of risk and deviance and the social, cultural and legal contexts for this study, as reference points within which to discuss the results from student discussions. I will now move into the first analysis chapter. This will begin by firstly outlining students' use of legal language and terminology when 'labeling' content, using current CPS guidelines and relevant legislation as a context within which to situate examination of those perspectives. Then, I will move onto explore the aesthetic, moral and emotional responses from students to the examples of content, plus how 'meaning' is ascribed, interpreted and constructed, and how these processes all contribute to shaping young people's perceptions of risk.

CHAPTER THREE: Labelling, judgement and meaning

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the 'labelling' or meaning-interpretation stage of risk analysis, based on empirical data from groups of young people in response to example social media posts. It is divided into three parts: Firstly, students' use and application of labels, specifically any references to legal and criminal terminology or concepts; secondly, how students interpreted the content of each post, dealing with ambiguity and the processes of constructing and contesting meaning; Finally, the moral, emotional and aesthetic judgements of the material and/or the sender.

Both risk and deviance are socially constructed concepts and definitions of what is considered risky or deviant behaviour varies between social groups and cultures, as well as over time (Lemert, 1967; Becker, 1973; Lupton 1999). Boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable conduct can be unstable, porous and constantly shifting, and so we rely on social reactions to develop understandings of where these boundaries may lie (Taylor et al, 1973). Constructions of risk are underpinned by collective understandings and are part of a continuous social process, which is why it is imperative to study groups and their interactions (Blumer 1969; Charon, 2010). These responses can also serve social functions for a group, such as reinforcing boundaries, providing social solidarity, challenging the 'status quo' and/or solidifying relationships (Lupton, 1999a). They potentially also indicate the presence of shared values, norms and wider social context.

"Sociologically, the critical variable in the study of deviance is the social audience" (Erikson, 1962: 308). Particularly when considering risk in the digital age, it has become increasingly popular for researchers to focus on younger people's perspectives of what is acceptable (or not) online (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte and Staksrud, 2014; Smahel and Wright, 2014; boyd, 2014; Shariff, 2015). Young people (generally considered 25 and under by Unicef) represent the largest consumers and *creators of* online content, and so positioning them as the social audience has relevance to law, education and technology policies (Buckingham, 2008; Buckingham and Kehily, 2014; Ofcom 2014a; 2017; Shariff, 2015). In addition, young people occupy intensified subjects of societies' 'hopes and fears' for the future, while remaining somewhat underrepresented in terms of rights, power and authority (Livingstone, 2009; Livingstone and Bulger, 2014; Gillespie, 2013). This also contributes to an imperative to examine emerging social issues of concern (e.g.

‘sexting’, ‘cyberbullying’, ‘revenge porn’) in a way that is inclusive of these youth perspectives.

This section will explore students' understanding of legal concepts and use of legal terminology in response to varying examples of online content, with an overview of existing legislation providing some context. Law by its very nature is also socially constructed, despite the fact that transgressions can result in very 'real' material consequences for young people and adults alike. As Muncie (2014) points out, the boundaries of criminality are subject to constant re-negotiation by law makers and law breakers, and (in the case of youth social media misuse) a whole host of other actors, such as teachers, parents, NGOs, technology companies etc. If we assume that individuals are neither ‘deviant’ nor ‘conformist’ per se, but shift between conforming and non-conforming behaviours (Matza, 1964/2009), then it is vital to investigate differing perceptions of where these boundaries lie. Furthermore, both legal and moral constructs of acceptability are typically defined and enforced by those in positions of social authority (Ericson, 1991: 223, see also Becker, 1967), a position that young people and children rarely occupy - except perhaps amongst peers (Olweus, 2012). Investigating youth perspectives on criminal, legal and social boundaries provides an opportunity to contribute useful insights to legal and policy debates, as well inform digital citizenship education initiatives.

3.1. Use of legal terminology/labels

This section attempts to pull apart and separately examine ‘criminal/legal’ labelling from ‘moral/emotional’ judgements expressed by participants. This is clearly problematic, as these distinctions can be difficult - if not impossible - to make (e.g. 'that’s racist’ could be considered a moral judgement, a legal label, or both). Equally, Lash (1993) asserts that aesthetic, emotional and moral responses do not constitute opposing or separate knowledge to ‘rational’ ones, but rather are intrinsically bound and often overlapping internal processes of judgement. That being said, there is arguably a different *social process* occurring externally when students choose to use words such "racist", "threatening", “homophobia”, “terrorism” or "slander" as well as or instead of phrases like "bad", "offensive" or "out of order". There were occasions, for example, when a student might describe a post as 'racist', but then assert it is 'not that bad'. This suggests that for some, legal descriptions may differ from moral judgements, hence the argument for attempting to separate these discussions for analysis. Clearly for some, there is a distinction “between acts that are wrong in

themselves, and acts that are illegal but not immoral", and visa versa (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 667).

The regular and frequent use of legal language and terminology was a somewhat unexpected finding to emerge from the data. The literature on young people and social media misuse, including 'cyberbullying', do not frequently discuss specific legislation (with some notable exceptions) (Cesaroni et al., 2012; Arntfield, 2014; Shariff, 2015). There is some conflict as to whether current laws surrounding cyberbullying are too lenient or too punitive when it comes to young perpetrators, or indeed whether bullying should even be considered a criminal matter at all. Researchers and educators alike have been criticised for failing to situate discussions on child-perpetrated cyber offences within existing legal, criminal or human rights frameworks - with some suggestion that this may perhaps be because they are unclear of the law themselves (boyd, 2008; Shariff, 2009; Purdy and York, 2016). It is perhaps more likely these broad terms like 'cyberbullying' have been applied to such a range of varying behaviours (some of which may break the law and others that may not), that this contributes to confusion (Powell-Jones, 2018). This ambiguity can present a problem for legislators, police and educators:

> "Harassment can consist of negative acts that occur once or many times, but differs in that the victim defines the action as harassment while the aggressor may not have harmful intentions. This misunderstanding is also present in anti- bullying statutes and laws that have been introduced in recent years with much legal confusion as to what bullying is, what harassment is, and what peer aggression is, in a computer mediated environment" (Deschamps and McNutt 2016: 52)

I felt it was therefore important for this study to examine how young people applied criminal or legal terms, such as 'harassment', to the range of different posts presented to them, and to understand more about their perceptions of law in general. This chapter will therefore focus on the labelling of content, rather than perceptions of policing or social control, as these will be addressed more closely in Chapter 6 ('Imagining Consequences').

a. Harassment

The term 'harassment', which probably correlates most closely with academic definitions of 'cyberbullying', is outlined in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997

as "'causing alarm or distress" (section 2) and/or "putting people in fear of violence" (section 4), and can also include "repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a victim" (including via social media). A prosecution requires evidence to prove "the conduct was targeted at an individual, was calculated to cause alarm or distress, and was oppressive and unreasonable" (PHA, 1997; CPS, 2018). Despite harassment law being raised by researchers who study 'cyberbullying' within a criminological or legal framework, it is interesting that not a single one of the 184 young participants in this study specifically used the term 'harassment', at any point. This is despite the fact that stimuli posts were specifically designed by the researcher to demonstrate examples of behaviour that may constitute this offence in the right context (e.g. Posts F, H or J).

The small sample involved in this qualitative study makes it inappropriate to generalise, but the suggestion is that young people may have different understandings of law – or at least the vocabulary of law - to adults who study this area. It is likely that teachers and parents do not employ this language when discussing inappropriate or bullying behaviours with young people, and who may well be unaware of the legislation themselves (Powell-Jones, 2018). School intervention and education projects relating to digital conduct tend to stress the social/moral repercussions of behaviour, rather than the legal/criminal repercussions, with little evidence of this affecting behaviour (Mishna et al., 2011; Schilder, Brusselaers and Bogaerts, 2016). Arguably, the legal terminology and definition may be appropriate, necessary even, to refer to when talking about violent or bullying behaviours with young people, but should ideally be part of broader public legal and human rights education (Myers and Cowie, 2016). In 'Why Is the Sky Blue?', a verbatim musical based on 10,000 interviews with young people about online pornography, the adult use of the phrase "inappropriate content" is mocked as a vague, catch-all term, with children highlighting how this actually *hinders* useful discussion on the subject (because they're unaware of the specifics of what is actually up for discussion) (dir. Wright, 2018). This indicates a need for adults to be more specific in defining what we actually mean, if we intend to open up dialogue with young people, about any kind of 'inappropriate' digital behaviour.

b. Terrorism and threats

Post D ("Delays @Heathrow Airport…") was rated as having a criminal risk more consistently than any other post presented to participants. A total of 15 'red' categorisations were mentioned in total, across all nine of the different workshops.

This was also the only post that elicited *at least one criminal categorisation* among every single one of the nine groups, and was the only post to do so (out of a total of 12). The words 'threat' or 'threatening' were mentioned 11 times across seven groups, while the words 'terrorism' or 'terrorist' were mentioned seven times across seven groups. *Every single group* responding to post D mentioned at least one of these terms ('threat' or 'terror') in their discussion of the risk. The vocabulary, as well as the categorisation, is quite revealing in terms of highlighting young people's concept of criminal risk re: terrorism and terror threats.

Terrorism is a recurring topic within research on risk and risk perceptions. Studies often use Beck's 'Risk Society' (1992) as part of their theoretical framework, which highlights terrorism as an example of a contemporary, far-reaching, devastating and unpredictable risk, that have become a part of risk considerations in 'everyday life'. In 'Living in a World Risk Society' (2006: 345), he claims we are faced with daily questions, which include, "how do we live, when the next terrorist attack is already in our heads? How worried should we be?" It would be valuable to explore in future research to what extent the risk of 'the next terrorist attack' exists in the minds of children, and how that might impact the way they perceive or manage risk in daily life. The EU Kids Online project revealed that 'the news' was one of the main 'content risks' children were concerned about, and coverage of terror attacks was among specific examples cited by young people as something that upset them (Livingstone et al, 2014). Some scholars claim children's perceptions of social threats (including crime and terrorism) tend to be linked to their levels of anxiety generally, rather than specifically correlating to their Internet or media use (Comer, Dack, Littler and Feldman, 2008). Others emphasise the media's power to potentially 'socially amplify' perceptions of risk, or create 'moral panics' around certain subjects (Kasperson et al, 2003; Cohen, 1972/2002). Terrorism, as a subject within the literature on risk, is almost exclusively framed in terms of participants' sense of risk as potential victims, rather than potential offenders, and so this study is contributing to knowledge in this area with the implication that there is a strong awareness of criminal repercussions for 'terror threats' among young people.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the criminal labels applied to Post D is that this demonstrates a potential *mis*conception of the law in relation to social media misuse. The post was intended to represent a 'joke' bomb threat, and was deliberately based upon an infamous tweet sent in 2010, which led to the so-called 'Twitter Joke Trial'. Paul Chambers had been prevented from flying out to visit his

girlfriend due to bad weather and posted on Twitter: "Crap! Robin Hood airport is closed. You've got a week and a bit to get your shit together otherwise I'm blowing the airport sky high!!" He was initially (and controversially) convicted of sending a menacing communication, under section 127 of the Communications Act 2003, but went on to successfully appeal his conviction at the High Court two years later (Bowcott, 2012). At the time, many felt this was an inappropriate and excessively punitive use of the legislation, with some legal scholars calling for "greater protection to be afforded to communications that are casual and amateur" on social media (Rowbottom, 2012: 355). In light of this case, it is unlikely that example post D would meet the threshold of harm required for a prosecution to be in the public interest, especially if involving a child, and yet the perception among the young participants is that this kind of content is unequivocally criminally risky.

c. Hate crime/hate speech

One of the major debates around online abuse is whether or not it represents a 'new' social problem or simply a reincarnation of age-old ones, such as racism, sexism, homophobia and other prejudices (Cesaroni et al, 2012; Shariff, 2015). Previous studies claim a fair proportion of young people report experiencing racism, homophobia and sexism online (Lilley et al, 2014; Livingstone et al, 2014), but the nature of this data is such that it is not always clear *how* these terms are understood and defined by young people. For example, NSPCC survey results show huge gender differences in the reporting of these kinds of online victimisation incidents, and so that problems are presented as disproportionately affecting boys: Notably, 11% of boys claiming they had encountered 'sexism' online, compared to just 4% of girls (Lilley et al, 2014: 25). This slightly odd result probably demonstrates a need for further critical investigation into how these labels are applied to individuals' experiences, particularly in the context of a world where occupants of the misogynistic 'manosphere' frequently complain of being 'silenced' by online feminists (Marche, 2016). One of the advantages of this research design is that student labels can at least be considered in response to specific examples of content and with opportunity for participants to elaborate on why and how they came to make a judgement.

This section will explore which posts promoted use of these particular labels (e.g. racism, homophobic, sexism, hate speech) from participants and the ways in which the concepts were explained in their own words. The notion of protected identity features appeared to be familiar among some students, with terms like "hate crime" or "hate speech" cropping up during discussion of posts and the associated risk. In

terms of risk ratings, examples that could be considered 'racist', 'homophobic' and 'sexist' in sentiment were given the following overall categorisations by participants (see: Fig J).

Fig J: Risk categorisations for posts with racist, homophobic or sexist sentiment

Category	Racist (A)	Racist (J)	Homo-phobic (E)	Homo-phobic (H)	Sexist (C)	Sexist (G)	Sexist (I)	Sexist (J)
Criminal	**9**	**9**	**9**	**6**	**11**	**14**	**11**	**9**
Civil	**7**	**11**	**8**	**11**	**8**	**25**	**17**	**11**
Social	**3**	**5**	**13**	**10**	**12**	**9**	**12**	**5**
No risk	**0**	**1**	**0**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**

Currently, the CPS outlines hate crime as offences that are racially and religiously aggravated; homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic; and disability hate crime. There has been much debate over recent years as to whether these categories of protected identity features ought to be extended to include a wider range of groups. For example, some police forces in England started to gradually include ‘subcultures’ as a hate crime category after murder of Sophie Lancaster, who self-identified as a goth, in 2007 (BBC News, 2015d). The inclusion of misogynistic hate crime was first trialled by Nottinghamshire Police in 2016, which was defined as: "Incidents against women that are motivated by an attitude of a man towards a woman and includes behaviour targeted towards a woman by men simply because they are a woman": they then handled 30 reported cases over 5 months (BBC News, 2016b; 2016c) A number of other counties have started to include women as a protected identity, too, but this is essentially at the discretion of local police forces, and does not yet represent national policy (ITV News, 2017).

Hate *speech* (different to hate crime) is perhaps a more complex area of law, with offences generally relating to the publication or distribution of material intended or likely to stir up hatred or violence against certain groups on the grounds of identity features. The amendments to the Public Order Act 1986 currently only relate to racial

hatred, religious hatred, and hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation, however, and so are not as broad as the hate crime protected categories. Under English law, basic offences (which can include those committed via social media, such as sending threatening communications or harassment) may attract extended sentences if proved to be motivated or aggravated by hatred or hostility on the grounds of these broader hate crime protected identity features.

d. Racism and xenophobia:

Posts A and J both prompted participants to label the content 'racist'. Post A ("Gurkhas are filth…) was deliberately designed to imitate hate speech, i.e. inciting hatred and violence against a group on the grounds of nationality/skin colour: "Sometimes it may be obvious that a person intends to cause racial hatred, for example, when a person makes a public speech *condemning a group of people because of their race* and deliberately *encouraging others to turn against them* and perhaps *commit acts of violence"* (CPS, 2017a - my emphasis). This was prompted by the researcher's experience as a news reporter in Aldershot, where a campaign for Gurkha rights was met with online hate (bizarrely, national coverage of this insisted on positioned white campaigner Joanna Lumley as the primary 'victim') (Caroe, 2011). Post J ("Beyoncé is nothing…) was intended to imitate sexist and racist abuse targeting Beyoncé, who at the time of writing is a hugely popular, award-winning African-American singer-songwriter and celebrity. In 2014, she became the highest earning black artist of all time, and her race, gender and sexuality remain popular subjects of academic discussion (e.g. Trier-Bieniek, 2016; Whitlock, 2014).

In response to post A ("Gurkhas..."), 'racist' or 'racism' was mentioned eight times across five different groups, and 'hate crime' and 'hate speech' were also mentioned by two groups. In response to post J ("Beyoncé…"), 'racist' or 'racism' was mentioned eight times across seven groups, with 'hate speech' also mentioned by one group and 'discrimination' mentioned by another. The labelling of content as racist was frequent but not universal among groups of all ages and gender-makeup and in fairly equal (quantitative) measures. Rather than being perceived as simply a dichotomous label (i.e. content either 'is' or 'isn't' racist), some participant responses suggest racism may also be perceived as something that operates on a spectrum or scale:

> *"It's a bit racist" [BH7A]; "Kind of racist" [SB8A]*; *"It's a bit racist" [BH12A]; "Quite racist" [BH13J]; "Full-on racist" [BH13A]"*

There was also some disagreement as to whether referring to a subject's race while at the same time being abusive would mean that the post was racist or not:

"Racist [because it says]: 'black'" [SB7J];

"It's racism. 'Black' [comment] is racist" [BH7J];

"Black is not racist, just a description" [SB13J]

One of the complications of this study was that not all students were familiar with the word 'Gurkha'. Some got the term confused with words like 'burqa' or 'gherkin' when asked if they knew what it meant; others admitted they had no idea. In trying to ensure consistency, the description given to all groups by the researcher was along the following lines: "Gurkhas are soldiers who fought for the British army, but who are not British. Their nationality is Nepalese, meaning they are from Nepal - which is a country next to India. Many Gurkhas were invited to live in Britain as a way of saying 'thank you' for fighting with the British Army. There is a big community of Gurkhas in Aldershot, because this is where 'the home of the British Army' is". Almost all the participants then appeared to be able to make a connection between the country of origin as being Nepal and the racist sentiment of the post, even with no prior knowledge of who the Gurkhas are. Whether or not it was considered to be *inciting* acts of violence was debated among participants, and something explored in more detail within the 'words versus action' analysis section (Chapter 5: 'Justifications and Neutralisations'). Notably, none of the 184 participants asked what 'racism' meant, indicating that both the concept and the term are familiar to students, even if not universally employed in their discussions of particular posts.

The term 'xenophobia' was not used by any participants, but appeared to be understood and explained in principle by some, along with the notion of prejudice more generally, in relation to posts A and J:

"It's saying 'cause they're not British they don't want them in their country" [BH7A]

"Generalised" [BH12A] *"Stereotyping" [BH8A]*

"Judging her on her looks and her race" [SB8J]

"Discrimination" [SB13J]

The EU Kids online project highlights racism and racist content (including racist jokes) as a content risk that concerns children who use the Internet (Livingstone et al, 2014). Other studies also show young people can become targets of cyberbullying specifically *because of* physical/appearance attributes, such as race or ethnicity (Cassidy et al, 2009; Cesaroni et al, 2012). This study contributes further evidence that prejudice based on race, ethnicity and nationality is generally considered a content 'risk'. While Lupton and Tulloch's (2002) study suggest the risks of racism are perceived to be a problem for 'Australian society as a whole', these results suggest that young people may perceive online expressions of racism as to users, too (in other words, a risk to individuals, not just the collective; and a risk to perpetrators, not just victims). As will be discussed in later chapters, however, this is not universally the case among the young participants, and constructions of *responsibility* for this risk still varies.

Existing youth 'cyberbullying' research, including this study, have tended to examine social prejudices as an afterthought or an aspect of online abuse, and so further research is needed with young people to investigate perceptions of risk in relation to online racism, law and policing as a more central focus. Lupton and Tulloch (2002) admit their results are likely influenced by the 'predominantly' white makeup of their focus groups. It is therefore also important to note that a majority of the participants of this study also appeared white (although, as with gender, ethnicity and race cannot comprehensively or accurately be 'observed'), and that the researcher is also a white British woman. This positionality undoubtedly influences the discussions and responses within the workshops, especially considering the targets of the example hate speech/racist posts are African-American and Nepalese. Existing research suggests that racism, xenophobia and hate crime remains a significant aspect of bullying in schools (Aziz, 2018; Aznar, Tenenbaum and Ruck, 2018). In light of concern that social media is being used as a tool to revive and spread extreme right-wing views (e.g., BBC News, 2016a), studies exploring youth perceptions of this kind of behaviour in a digital context is certainly something that merits further research.

<u>e. Homophobia:</u>

Posts E ("I'm sick to death of ****ing dykes…") and H ("Peter: You are GAY…") were intended to indicate homophobic sentiment. The former was designed to imitate explicit threats of violence, motivated by hostility on the grounds of sexual orientation (contrary to amendments to the Public Disorder Act 1986). The latter was designed to imitate a potentially subtler expression that could arguably constitute peer

homophobic bullying, harassment and/or privacy breaches, depending on the intention and context, and the impact on the subject ('Peter'). The labelling of these posts as homophobic was not as common as the labelling of posts A and J as racist. As with post A ("Gurkhas…"), language created a few issues, as some participants were unfamiliar with the term "dyke". The researcher explained this as "a slang word meaning 'lesbian' that can be offensive". Interestingly, other participants in the class often explained to peers that this means lesbian, although the potential offensiveness was sometimes overlooked. The extent to which this word is or is not considered offensive is highly context specific, and ought to be primarily be defined by those who self-identify with this group.

Post E prompted student use of the term 'homophobic' or 'homophobia' a total of six times, with 'threat' or 'threatening' being mentioned seven times. Understanding of the concept of 'hate speech' or protected identities is also evident among a few students:

"Hate crime. Hating lesbians. Homophobic language" [BH7E];

"It's a threat to a type of person" [SB8E];

"It's a hate crime" [BH8E]

One student appeared to acknowledge homophobia in principle, but mistakenly questioned if it was a "*homosexual comment?" [BH9E]* before another student corrected him. Another student appeared confused about the homophobic element, because *"[It] doesn't say gay?" [BH8E].* Similar to post A, participants were mostly concerned with whether the message could directly be linked to acts of violence when considering risk, suggesting that explicit threats are perceived to be far riskier (in legal terms) than homophobic or racist material generally. The notion of online speech acts as part of a continuum of violence, or tool for continued oppression (Salter, 2017), was not hugely evident among participants' discussions, but will be discussed in more depth later in this thesis (Chapter 5: Justifications and Neutralisations: Words vs. Actions).

Post H ("Peter: You are GAY…") only elicited responses with the label 'homophobia' or 'homophobic' a total of four times, slightly less than post E. Although the participants appeared to immediately recognise that the content related to Peter's sexuality, there was much disagreement as to whether or not the message was homophobic, or how 'risky' this was, in legal terms:

"It's being rude about the fact that he's gay... It's homophobic. That's a criminal offence" [BH7H]

"Homophobic. Not a nice way of saying it [that someone is gay]" [SB8H]

"[Yellow: social risk] 'Cause it's not saying it's dirty or gross. The word 'gay' is not an insult, not offensive, just a word you use" [BH10H]

"You can't just say 'You're gay' to someone. Shouldn't say it like that" [BH10H]

"Harmless. Not saying 'you're gay and it's bad'. If he was gay, he could just comment back and say 'yes'. Stating a fact." [BH12H]

"Using gay as derogatory. It's bullying". [BH13H]

"Derogatory" [SB13H]

As with the term "black" in post J ("Beyoncé…"), some participants felt that the term "gay" was purely descriptive and not vindictive, while others felt the message was homophobic and intended to upset Peter. The posts were not universally labelled as homophobic, much like the racist posts, and generally less likely to be labelled using this specific terminology. Although it is not possible to generalise, this suggests some young people may not feel as assertive about labelling content as homophobic, compared with labelling content as racist. Students' apparent confusion may also support the argument that homophobia as a term and/or concept is potentially just not as familiar as racism. Research shows that peer-to-peer bullying because of actual or perceived sexual orientation persists within schools, despite guidelines for intervention (Rivers, 2018). This study suggest homophobic messages may be perceived as riskier if combined with threats of violence, but may be less likely to be considered 'homophobic' at all, *unless* combined with threats. A multitude of contextual factors seemed to influence student perceptions of risk, including humour or 'banter' (Chapter 5: Justifications and Neutralisations), as well as things like friendship and sender intentions (Chapter 4: Relationships, power, proximity and status).

Legal context is relevant here as well. Under section 74 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, an amendment to part 3A of the Public Order Act 1986 was created to include provision for hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation, which is similar to that of religious hatred. These, however, are slightly different to material stirring up *racial* hatred: essentially, prosecution for homophobic messages requires

intent to stir up hatred (not just likelihood), and must also be deemed *threatening*, rather than just offensive or insulting:

> "Conduct (either words or behaviour) or material which is *threatening* in nature, and which *is intended* to stir up hatred against a group of people who are defined by reference to sexual orientation. By contrast, the racial hatred offences cover a wider range of conduct or material including that which is *threatening, abusive or insulting,* and which is intended or *likely to* stir up hatred….
>
> Conduct or material which *only stirs up ridicule or dislike*, or which *simply causes offence*, would not meet the requisite threshold required by the Act, i.e. hatred. So, for example, the offences do not, and are not intended to extend per se to *childish name calling, or the telling of jokes, or the preaching of religious doctrine*, unless those activities are threatening or intended to stir up hatred." (CPS 2017a - my emphasis)

Participants' perceptions of criminal risks arguably seem to *align with* the approach of the CPS re: social media material stirring up hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation vs. race. Young people's perceptions and understanding of homophobia more generally, and how this relates to hate speech legislation, merits further investigation. Exiting studies have highlighted how homophobic 'jokes' often play a role in the social policing of gender norms by peers (Marwick and boyd, 2014b), while many 'cyberbullying' education initiatives have been criticised for a lack of inclusion of LGBTQ+ concerns (Shariff, 2005; 2009; Rice et al. 2015). The fact that post H ("Peter: You are GAY…") was categorised four times in this study as posing absolutely *no* risks at all, not even a social, reputational or ethical risk (see Fig. J), indicates a need for further attention on this issue. As such, I would argue this study add to evidence for more initiatives aimed at addressing online abuse or bullying to ensure they are LGBTQ+ inclusive (Rivers, 2018).

f. Misogyny, sexism and gendered/sexualised content

There were many more posts included in the workshop demonstrating misogynistic and sexist sentiment than racism or homophobia. However, these did not elicit similar responses from participants with regard to *labelling* them as such, as will be discussed. The posts constituting gendered/sexualised content, misogyny or sexism

are post C, G, I and J. The rationale behind the posts, plus the discussion of the legal risks of each, will be briefly outlined prior to analysis for context:

Post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say no…") is intended to imitate an example of rape culture/victim blaming; an expression of misogynistic sentiment that does not include foul language and is unlikely to break any English laws regarding communications sent via social media (protected speech under Article 10 HRA: Freedom of expression; including unpopular or offensive opinions).

Post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") is intended to represent the distribution/sharing of an indecent, sexual or private video, known informally as 'revenge pornography' or more accurately as 'image-based sexual abuse' (McGlynn, 2017; McGlynn, Rackley and Houghton, 2017). This breaches section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, which makes it an offence "for a person to disclose a private sexual photograph or film if the disclosure is made without the consent of an individual who appears in the photograph or film, and with the intention of causing that individual distress" (CJCA, 2015). The additional potential risk with this post is if 'Alice' is under 18, this would also break criminal law regarding indecent images of children. Legislation surrounding distribution of indecent images (video, photos and depictions) of children is outlined in the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and classes children as under 18s. If, hypothetically, this were a perfectly legal pornographic video, this distribution may raise concerns regarding access to and distribution of pornography among children, but would be unlikely to pose a legal risk to a sender per se.

Post I ("Jenny is a right slag….") carries a legal risk as the post contains an allegation of a teacher-student sexual relationship. The risk, assuming this were true, lies in the identification of 'Alice', contrary to the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992: all sexual offences claimants are entitled to automatic and lifelong anonymity, with sexual offences outlined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The law also grants special anonymity protections for teachers accused of a criminal offence by or on behalf of a pupil, under section 13 of the Education Act 2011, so identifying 'Mr Sanders' also carries a legal risk prior to being charged. If untrue, the material is likely to be considered libellous under the Defamation Act 2013. The use of language is also misogynistic/sexist ("slag"), as the inherent sentiment is that a pupil being sexually abused by a male teacher in a position of trust is 'giving it out'/'asking for it' (rape culture/victim blaming).

As previously highlighted, post J (Beyoncé is nothing…") includes racial and sexualised abuse, through reference to skin colour and use of a gendered slur ("slut"). Messages that target individuals, and causing alarm and distress, can be considered harassment under the PHA 1997, particularly if part of a course of conduct (e.g. repeated unwanted behaviour).

What stands out from the participant responses to these four posts is that the labelling terminology used to critique the sentiment (misogynistic/sexist) is far less common than that of racist or homophobic sentiment. All of the above example posts prompted at least one categorisation of 'Green', indicating no risk whatsoever associated with posting this content online (See: Fig. J). Notably, post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") was the post with the *least* consensus from participants in terms of risk categorisation (see: Fig. J), prompting no less than 50 different risk ratings across the nine groups. Post I, the next most contested post, elicited more than 40. This suggests that risk perceptions of posting gendered and sexualised abuse varies a lot among young people, which may be partly due to the variation in how the matter is policed in offline environments (ITV News, 2017). As one student expressed, *"it's not really against a group though," [BH8C]* suggesting that women and girls are not conceptualised as a 'group' (even less a minority group in need of protections) in the same way as other identities perhaps are.

Labels such as 'sexism', 'sexist' or 'misogyny' were not mentioned by *any* of the students in response to the posts. Only one student seemed aware of the concept, albeit confused, however, in response to post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say no…"):

> *"[Red – criminal risk] Is it homophobic? [Teacher – female - intervenes, saying, "Do you mean sexist? Against women?" [Student confirms that's what they meant]" [BH7C]*

Notably, none of the young participants asked the researcher what 'rape' meant, suggesting even those as young as 11 are familiar with the concept. This is particularly interesting because this example is the only post that (as part of a pilot study at a separate school) has ever been requested to be removed from this workshop by a staff member, who said she felt it would require parental approval before she would feel comfortable showing or discussing the post with Year 7 students. It is not unusual for adults to assume children are ignorant of these matters, and attempt to 'shield' them from exposure to protect their 'innocence' (Kitzinger,

1988; Jackson and Scott, 1999). A few students did indicate that they felt post C would carry a criminal risk for the sender, however:

> *"[the sender] should be put in prison" [SB13C]*
>
> *“it's making fun of people who have been raped. That's illegal” [BH7C]*
>
> *“Isn't it taking advantage of the girl? [Red - criminal] Saying she should've said no [pulls a frown face, as in 'that doesn't make sense', its 'stupid'] 'Rape' means people can't stop it." [BH7C]*

There was a trend for younger students to assign this post higher risk ratings than the older students, who were more likely to highlight it as an expression of an unpopular opinion, and (although offensive) not breaking any law. As with other posts, a major factor within young people’s risk assessments was to what extent the sender’s sentiment about rape was an indicator of *actions*, either past or future (this will be discussed in more detail in the ‘words vs. actions’ section of Chapter 5).

In discussions of post G, participants appeared to understand and articulate that this was likely to be a sexual or private video, and that sharing it would be problematic. However, there was no specific use of the phrase ‘revenge porn/pornography’, or even ‘sexting’. This is somewhat surprising given the extent to which this terminology is used within the media (some argue to contribute to ‘moral panic’ about girls’ sexuality) (Karaian, 2013; 2015). Nonetheless, the legal *concept* appeared to be understood: e.g. *“Sounds sexual. Posting without her consent is a crime” [BH13G].* The notion of consent or permission was discussed in great detail by participants in relation to risk and will be discussed in relation to concepts of ‘victim-blaming’ and ‘responsibilisation’ (Chapters 4 and 5). Participants also seemed aware of the concept of indecent images of children being against the law, as the age of ‘Alice’ was highlighted by a number of groups when discussing potential criminal risks:

> *“She could be under eighteen” [BH7G]*
>
> *“If its porn you and they could be arrested if they’re underage? [SB8G]*
>
> *“If you’re over eighteen then its fine” [BH9G]*
>
> *“Could be underage” [BH10G]*

"If its child pornography, then [Red - criminal] if they're under sixteen or eighteen. It's illegal" [BH10G]

"If she's underage then [Red - criminal] [Researcher asks: What age?] Sixteen? Eighteen?" [SB13G]

Participants' perceptions of age of the subject as being a significant risk factor demonstrates some awareness of child protection laws in principle, but with some confusion as to whether the age in question is 16 or 18. Most likely this is explained by the age of consent in England and Wales being 16 (students in previous workshops have expressed confusion or even outrage that consensual sexual interaction is permitted at 16, but that consensual sharing of sexual images is restricted by law for a further two years). The CPS recently confirmed that it would not pursue prosecutions for this: "it would not usually be in the public interest to prosecute the consensual sharing of an image between two children of a similar age in a relationship" (CPS, 2018). Age was also a significant risk factor for other posts, with a suggestion that behaviours acceptable for adults (e.g. sex, drinking, etc.) are perceived as risky when undertaken by children (Austen, 2009; Jackson and Scott, 1999). Risk and age will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (Relationships, proximity, power and status).

It is likely that the gender of participants, and the gender makeup of the groups, influenced students discussions of risk in relation to post G, a theory that is supported by previous empirical study. The risks associated with sharing of sexual images (consensually or not), tend to be framed exclusively as affecting girls as 'potential victims', rather than boys as 'potential offenders', adding to a sense responsibilisation for girls to 'manage' these risks (Ringrose et al, 2012; Karaian, 2013; Gabriel, 2014; Korenis and Billick, 2014; Gorden-Messer et al, 2013; Salter, 2017). Quantified data from this study suggest the risks associated with sharing indecent or sexual video images of 'Alice' (post G) are perceived to be higher among all-girl groups, and slightly lower among mixed gender groups (see: Fig. K). This potentially supports previous research suggesting girls may assimilate with boys' viewpoints expressed during mixed group discussions (Shucksmith and Henry, 1998).

Fig. K: Total risk ratings by gender makeup In response to post G ("You gotta watch…")		
	MIXED	GIRLS
Criminal	**6**	**8**
Civil	**11**	**14**
Social	**5**	**4**
None	**2**	**0**

g. Other legal risks

Other legal terms used by participants during discussions included 'blackmail', 'slander' and 'paedophilia'. At times, other legal *concepts* appeared to be acknowledged in principle, although not always articulated in terms of legal language. For example, some participants expressed an apparent awareness of 'contempt of court', rights to anonymity, or right to a fair trial:

> *"You've given out the names of people doing a crime" [BH9J]*
>
> *"Given away the name of who it is. Isn't that illegal?"* [BH9I]
>
> *"If a jury sees it, it could sway them to not give him [Mr Sanders] a fair trial" [BH10I]*

Some students' inferred knowledge or understanding of the law through their highlighting of 'risky' aspects of posts (for example: *"Taken a picture from the BBC website [copyright]" [SB13B]*), others asserted their perceptions as legal fact (not always correctly, for example: *"Suicide is illegal" [SB8B]).* Although this study cannot claim to contribute an accurate picture of 'typical' youth understandings of social media and the law due to the small sample (see Chapter 2), the way in which legal concepts and terminology are explained, applied and (at times) misunderstood by young people, merits further study. The use of legal or criminal terms potentially symbolises students' attempts to legitimise constructions of risk; an imitation of the language (and power) asserted by adults in society to condemn or justify certain behaviours. In addition, students' legal understanding is not only a pivotal aspect of constructing risk, but also constructing rights. If young people receive racially motivated threatening messages, or are victims of image-based sexual abuse, or online harassment, there may be a small consolation in being able to add weight to a

complaint and grant symbolic 'permission' to condemn the behaviour through recognition of a breach of the law, and the ability to label these experiences using correct legal terms. This may especially important in cases when young people need to seek adult support and intervention with digital abuse, something that is still relatively unusual (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Li, 2010; Purdy and York, 2016).

3.2. Ambiguity, uncertainty and interpreted meaning(s)

Some of the posts presented to the students were deliberately crafted with an intended meaning, but often they were deliberately vague to open up discussion of context. At times, participants nonetheless asserted some posts as having an explicit meaning. For example, a number of participants felt the meaning of post D was unequivocally clear: this is a threat to blow up Heathrow airport. Other posts provoked similar certainty from some students, who indicated they perceived there to be a definitive 'meaning' to the message:

> *"It's agreeing with rape" [SB7C];*
>
> *"It's saying he's going to smack the next lesbian he sees" [BH10E];*
>
> *"It's saying cause they're not British they don't want them in this country" [BH7A];*
>
> *"It's being rude about the fact that he's gay" [BH7H];*
>
> *"It's telling them to commit suicide" [SB7J];*
>
> *"[It's] calling the teacher a paedophile" [BH9I];*
>
> *"[Its] saying it's a dump [the school]"* [BH8K]

In some instances, students' interpretations of a post's meaning were different to what was intended or expected. The clearest example of this is post F ("Waiting at the gates…"). The aim was to provide an example of an implied threat of violence and some students did conclude that it was suggestive of beating someone up or breaking their legs. However, a number of students asserted that this message was not only violent, but also sexual in nature. Participants claimed the post was *"weirdly sexual",* that it *"could be [directed at] a sexual partner"* or that the sender *"could be a paedophile"*. One group discussed this in a fair bit of detail:

> *"[It's] admitting they're a paedophile. Could be used as evidence. Could be used against them in court. Suggesting they've done it before [I asked 'done what?' to clarify] - Had sex with a child. [Student indicates RED category = criminal risk] I didn't identify it as paedophilia at first, just thought they meant beat up, but if he did do it [have sex with a child] they could be arrested"* [BH13F]

These responses demonstrate how meaning truly is 'in the eye of the beholder'. Here, the audience of a post constructed a meaning that the post creator (in this case, the researcher) had not anticipated at all. Rather naively, I didn't assume participants would conjure up an interpretation that I had not already considered, so this was a genuinely surprising finding. This reinforces why the methodology works (youth-led, peer group, discussion based): it allows these alternative interpretations to come to light and emphasises the need for adult researchers working with young people to avoid, where possible, assuming that participants' meanings and interpretations will align with their own (Christensen and Prout, 2005; Barbovschi et al, 2013). We know from empirical engagement with young people that they may have very different interpretations of online behaviour to adults (McAfee, 2012; 2014; boyd, 2014; Ofcom 2015; 2017), and that vague terms like 'cyberbullying' or 'inappropriate content' could mean different things to different people (Bauman, 2013; Deschamps and McNutt, 2016; Wright, dir., 2018).

Participants' interpretation of post F as being a reference to paedophilia or rape was perhaps partly a surprise because of the serious criminal sexual nature (i.e. adult nature) of the subject. Historically, it has been somewhat socially taboo in the UK to openly discuss sex with children and, as such, it can be incorrectly assumed that they are all ignorant of such matters. Sexual abuse, in particular, has been positioned as something children ought to be deliberately *kept* ignorant of, in order to 'protect childhood innocence' (Kitzinger, 1988; Jackson and Scott, 1999). Responses to post F (as well as others) indicate some young people are clearly very aware of issues like paedophilia and rape. The topic of child sex abuse, and young participants' perspectives of risk in relation to this, is discussed in more detail with particular attention towards 'power and status' in Chapter 4. Here, it is simply important to note that despite the fairly prescriptive format of this study into risk (i.e. carefully designed stimuli and highly structured workshop activities), participants still contributed data that were unintended and unanticipated by the researcher – demonstrating why qualitative, empirical methods matter.

Not all participants were assertive or conclusive about their interpretation of a post, with many acknowledging *implicit,* rather than explicit, meaning. For example:

> *"It sounds like a threat" [SB7F];* *"Suggesting beating up [SB8F];*
>
> *"Heavily implies children" [SB13F];* *"Implying [it's] her fault [SB13C];*
>
> *"BOOM suggests explosives" [SB8D]*

The ability to imagine, question and contest a sender's intended meaning was an important aspect of group risk discussions, and many students were able to recognise and articulate differences between what was explicit and inferred. Ambiguity and uncertainty were generally perceived to be a factor that *reduced* the risk to a sender (*"Authorities wouldn't take it seriously because it's not explicit."* [SB13F].) A lack of indisputably clear meaning of a post tended to be used by participants as a route to defending a sender, arguing that seemingly threatening messages could potentially be harmless. This is demonstrated among some responses to post D ("Massive delays @HeathrowAirport…"):

> *"BOOM; [could mean] just really angry" [SB7D]*
>
> *"You don't know if it's real. It could just be an angry person. You don't know what they mean when they say "BOOM". Could be an emotional outburst [student indicates someone losing their temper, throwing their hands in the air as if to say 'I've had enough!'] [BH7D]*
>
> *"'BOOM' might mean 'I'll just leave! Walk out! Not necessarily a bomb… "[It's] not clear from the writing what the meaning is"* [BH12D]

It is perfectly possible that the phrase 'boom' could have alternative meanings to students than a bomb; the term can be used conversationally as a sort of oral exclamation mark:

> "Used as an oral exclamation mark but in a purely conversational context. Its function is not as heightened as the aforementioned symbol so its impact is designed to simply reinforce ones point or statement. Generally found in light hearted, but not overtly humorous, situations. "Dinner's ready.... Boom". "Just quit my job... Boom"." (Larkin, 2009).

The light-hearted and humorous use of 'boom' to emphasise a point (not unlike the physical gesture to indicate a 'mic drop') is one potential explanation for participants' attempts to justify this post and exonerate the sender. Despite this, not *all* students felt this 'ambiguity' would automatically mean a lower level of risk to a sender (further discussion in Chapter 5: Justifications and neutralisations).

Implicit threats of interpersonal violence were sometimes discussed in a similar way, with ambiguity used as technique for defending a sender, or downgrading the risk category: *"[Indicates Yellow: social risk] You don't know what they're actually saying" [BH7F]*. According to legislation governing social media in England and Wales, menacing and threatening communications do *not* need to be explicit to warrant prosecution. Authorities judge the meaning of the content on the basis of what the 'average reader' of a message would infer, and whether it could 'reasonably' be considered menacing, or cause alarm or distress to a recipient. The Malicious Communications Act 1988 and section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 state there must be *intention or likelihood* of producing this effect. This to some degree mirrors many of the participants' arguments: a sender is more likely to argue *denial of this intent*, if the meaning of the message was unclear. The theme of denial is an important one in relation to constructs of risk and deviance, and will be discussed in more depth throughout Chapters 5 and 6 (Cohen, 2001; Maruna and Copes, 2005).

Similarly, there is a defence in the law if a message is 'unlikely' to cause fear, alarm or distress, as is elaborated within the judgement on the Paul Chambers' 'Twitter joke trial' case:

> "If the person or persons who receive or read it... would brush it aside as a silly joke, or a joke in bad taste, or empty bombastic or ridiculous banter, then it would be a contradiction in terms to describe it as a message of a menacing character… A message which does not create fear or apprehension in those to whom it is communicated, or who may reasonably be expected to see it, falls outside this provision, for the very simple reason that the message lacks menace." (Paul Chambers vs. DPP, 2012)

Participants' perceptions that certain messages were less risky may also be due to this lack of 'menacing' or 'serious' tone. A sender could be constructed as intending to create humour, not cause fear, another aspect of justification and neutralisation explored in more detail in Chapter 5. The extent to which some participants argued that a post could mean something *other* than the obvious was at times a source of

humour in itself. For example, the majority of students discussing post L (“Double science…”) focused on the risk of publicly sharing evidence of underage alcohol consumption. One student attempted to argue ‘innocence’ on the part of the sender, on the grounds that they *"could mean 'Monster' energy drink" [BH7L]* rather than an alcoholic hangover. This is perhaps evidence of the ‘poly-vocality’ (consideration of multiple viewpoints or possibilities) mentioned in Chapter 2, another interesting aspect of research using vignettes or stimuli scenarios (O’Dell et al, 2012).

Sender intention was an important aspect of participants’ risk considerations, particularly whether they perceived a post to be 'serious' or not. This is highlighted by responses to Post B (“I’M SO UPSET…[features a photo of One Direction]”.) Around the time of the workshop design, ‘One Direction’ was a boy band that was immensely popular, particularly among teenagers. There was a social media storm when one of the members - Zayn - announced he was leaving the band to begin a solo career. While Post B might at first glance seem humorous or ridiculous, the rationale behind its inclusion has a more serious context: #Cut4Zayn and similar hashtags were used by teenagers to share examples of self-harm, as a form of almost competitive public display of grief at the news (Rainey, 2015). A few participants seemed to argue Post B might indicate genuine feelings of anguish or despair, while others expressed scepticism of the ‘seriousness’ of the post:

> *"Kind of suicidal? But it's maybe not serious" [BH8B]*
>
> *"They're saying they want to die" [BH9B]*
>
> *"Probably doesn’t mean it. Just being a drama queen" [BH10B]*
>
> *"Obviously doesn't mean it, so green [No risk]" [BH12B].*
>
> *"It shows suicidal thoughts! [other students in the group start laughing, and she tells them 'It's not funny, it's serious!", but she is smiling/grinning] [BH9B]*

This shows the complexity of assessing risk re: online content, when faced with the notion of a sender potentially 'not meaning' what they say. Certain behaviours, even physical violence, can be categorised as playing, pretending or performing, as opposed to 'real' or ‘serious’, particularly in relation to social bonding or “banter” (Huizinga, 1949; Myers, 2006; 2010). Marwick and boyd investigate the concept of online "drama" among young people (girls in particular), which is defined as "performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged

audience, often on social media" (2014b: 1187; see also: Goffman, 1990). Clear distinctions were made by boyd and Marwick's (2014b) young participants between what they considered 'cyberbullying' and what was 'just drama'. This correlates with other cyberbullying research, where *intention to harm* is a key aspect of whether behaviour is considered problematic by young people or not (Olweus, 2012; Talwar et al 2014). As a general trend, interpretation of a message as not 'real' or 'serious' correlated with a downgrading of risk by participants in this study - even if the 'real' meaning could then be something potentially *very* serious. This was not only the case for expressions of suicidal feelings (Post B), but also allegations of child sexual abuse (Post I: "Jenny is a right slag…"). Allegations of a teacher-student relationship were automatically dismissed by a significant number of students as being 'false', despite the fact that no context was provided:

> *"[It's] spreading rumours" [BH8I]*
>
> *"It's a lie, so you could be sued for that" [BH9I]*
>
> *"Could be false, probably is, that's a lie" [BH12I]*
>
> *"If it's not true, made up, also bullying Jenny" [BH12I]*
>
> *"He [teacher] could get arrested, people thinking he's a paedophile, and he's like 'I'm not.'" [BH12I]*

These responses could be explained by a number of things, one of which may be linked to power imbalances between students and teachers, and differences in credibility and status between adults and children (explored in more detail in Chapter 4). Another possible explanation is participants' reliance on 'tacit knowledge' (taken for granted/unarticulated awareness, primarily developed through interactions and experiences) (Wolfinger, 2002). If we consider that it is a normal, frequent and taken for granted part of student culture to make up rumours, lies and in-jokes about teachers - including ones alleging inappropriate conduct - then it would be reasonable for students to assume this message may not be 'serious', 'true' or 'real'. The Symbolic/Cultural approach to risk asserts that our judgements are heavily context-specific and influenced by peer groups and social norms, rather than 'rational risk information' (Douglas, 1992; 2002; Pilkington, 2007; Lupton, 1999a; 2013). Evaluations of risk overlap with constructs of truth, reality and seriousness, at times even resulting a response of denial (themes explored further in Chapters 5 and 6). Perceptions of truth, lies, humour, rumour and reality in relation to social media

content represents an emerging and important area of potential future research, particularly in light of the proliferation and panic surrounding so-called ‘fake news’ (Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Washington Post, 2016). This study with young people highlights, conversely, the risk of true or serious material being *disbelieved,* as much as ‘joke’ or ‘fake’ content being considered truthful or real.

For the purposes of this study, interpreting and constructing meaning represents a conceptualised ‘primary stage’ of making risk judgements in response to content. However, this is not a new concept. In ‘the Death of the Author’ (1967), Barthes discusses how text (in this case, literary works) became ‘liberated’ from meanings entrenched in the biography and context of the original creator, allowing audiences to bring their own meaning and contexts to an interpretation (Hird, 2010). In a similar way, these online example posts were deliberately devoid of context, allowing the social audience of young people to construct their own interpretations. With no ‘author’/creator/sender to reference, participants were forced to draw on tacit knowledge, previous experience, and peers when considering meaning. It is interesting to note participants’ variation of *certainty* of their interpreted meaning, even in response to the same posts. Some assert their interpreted meaning as if it were fact ('it is saying this'), others acknowledge ambiguity and implied meaning ('it is suggesting or could mean this'), some assert a meaning that is contradictory to the post ('saying this, but doesn't mean it') and some simply conclude that meaning is elusive ('we don't know what it means').

The examples tended to elicit contradictions and multiplicity among participants in terms of ‘meaning’, but without prompting any obvious conflict or confrontation. This perhaps suggests an acceptance among groups of young people of a somewhat ‘post-modern’ epistemological perspective, where everyone is entitled to disagree, because no one interpretation is ever 'right' or 'wrong'. Future research would be useful to investigate how these conflicting perspectives might be negotiated when a consensus is necessary (e.g. among a jury during a trial), or to investigate the question of *who* participants feel has the right to ultimately decide the final meaning of a message (Becker, 1967). Paul Chambers eventually won his appeal, but only after having initially been convicted by two separate judges, whose verdict was the tweet *was* menacing/threatening and therefore illegal (Bowcott, 2012). While participants in this study were very happy to offer their interpretations within a classroom setting for this research, their power and rights to assert meaning and maintain control over their

social media messages are highly restricted in the reality of the wider world (Livingstone and Bulger, 2014; boyd, 2014).

3.3. Moral, emotional and aesthetic reasons

Assessments of risk and deviance rely heavily on social and cultural context, and 'emotionally situated' knowledge (Lupton, 1999a; Becker, 1973). Douglas (1992; 2002) argues what is 'risky' within a social group operates on a symbolic level, connected ideologically with what is taboo, sinful, breaching a boundary or subverting the norm. 'Facts' and 'feelings', in this sense, are interconnected when we make judgements about risk or crime (Lash, 1993). Moreover, negative emotions can be employed as a tool for informal social control, with risky or deviant behaviour associated with disgust, fear, shame, horror, guilt, shock etc. (Lupton, 2013). As such, emotional responses were important to consider when conducting this research into perceptions of risk and deviance in relation to social media posts.

Participants would often laugh or gasp when the stimuli posts were first placed in front of them during the workshops. This would happen at first reading, before students had a chance to fully articulate points for discussion with peers. These performative expressions of an emotional response speak volumes about the very social nature of risk and deviance. Essentially, what is risky or deviant is whatever causes a stir among 'right-thinking members of society' ('right-thinking' continues to be used as part of legal definitions, such as within the Defamation Act 2013, and bring to mind social hierarchies, which will be explored further in Chapter 4). The concept of 'right-thinking people' being shocked or outraged by behaviour can potentially operate in reverse as a form of social policing; in other words, if one is *not* visibly 'shocked' or 'outraged' by certain behaviour, one is perhaps not 'right-thinking'. The social function of outwardly expressed negative emotions in response to 'bad behaviour' is frequently discussed within the literature on both risk and deviance (Kitsuse, 1962; Taylor et al, 1973; Douglas, 1992; 2002; Dubreuil, 2010). With roughly half of UK children having used a social networking site by the age of ten years old (KnowTheNet, 2014), it is unlikely these stimuli posts would genuinely be a 'shock' (i.e. unusual or rare) to the participants. As it happens, many of the students later articulated how 'normal' or 'widespread' this kind of offensive content is online (with further details in Chapter 6). This suggests that shocked and giggly responses perhaps serve a performative, social function within the classroom setting, either for the audience of peers or (perhaps more likely) the adult researcher-tutor.

Risk constructions are also linked with ideas about morality. Giddens' concept of 'Reflexive Modernity', (1990; 1991; 1999) Beck's 'Risk Society' (1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and Bauman's 'Liquid Modernity' (2005) all make some reference to the concept of the 'ideal citizen' as one who independently and responsibly structures their life and choices around the management of risks. There are social, moral and emotional pressures for individuals to not only become aware of risks, but also to manage those risks accordingly. As Lupton (1999) points out, 'failure' to make oneself aware of these risks, or to manage them 'appropriately', can result in condemnation from authorities and peers, or even lead to interventions. Risky behaviour is therefore not just considered stupid, but potentially *immoral*. Participants' perceptions of morality, i.e. how 'bad' content is, were therefore important to consider when investigating how they constructed risk. That is not to say that these are by any means unanimous. Responses to risk involve so much contradiction, complexity and ambivalence, that some have argued we ought to conceptualise a collection of 'risk cultures', rather than a 'risk society' when thinking theoretically about risk (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002: 6).

Not all posts were considered as having a 'moral' element, however. Whereas other posts frequently prompted responses indicating how offensive or immoral they were, Post D ("@HealthrowAirport…") was considered almost exclusively in terms of 'meaning' (i.e. bomb threat/joke) and then 'perceived consequences' (i.e. arrest). Labelling of the post as a 'threat' or 'terrorism' seemed somewhat 'amoral' judgements. This distinguishes it from other examples that were perceived to be criminal, which provoked moral assertions and labels (e.g. offensive, rude, disgusting, out of order) *in addition* to potentially criminal consequences. Only one student made a 'moral' comment, saying*, "[they've] tagged Heathrow Airport… it would worry people" [BH10D]*. Yet even this is more of an 'ethical' consideration (the potential emotional impact upon others), rather than a moral assessment of the conduct, the content, or the sender. It seems rather strange that negative moral judgements of the sender were absent from discussions considering this was the post with the most consensus of criminal risk. Perhaps, to some students, the tone of the message was so clearly 'not serious' that the sender merits justification, not condemnation, despite the legal risk of their 'joke'. Perhaps, to others, terrorist threats are perceived to be so very serious, that negative judgement is simply assumed and does not need articulating.

For most of the other posts, however, students were quick to outline their moral assessments when thinking about risk, with responses like "bad", "rude" and "offensive" cropping up frequently. Posts A ("Gurkhas are filth…") and J ("Beyoncé is nothing…") were condemned (albeit not universally) on a moral front by many students, regardless of whether they also labelled them as being racist, or allocated them a criminal risk category:

"Quite offensive to people who helped us" [BH8A]

"Insensitive to people who fought in the army." [SB8A]

"It's disrespectful. Really bad" [BH10A]

"Really offensive" [BH12A]

"Offensive. Disgusting. Now I give it a second look I think maybe red [criminal risk]" [BH13A]

"It's being rude and disrespectful" [SB8J]

"Really offensive" [BH10J]

"Quite racist. Offensive" [BH13J]

These responses indicate a value system among some participants, where respect, manners, sensitivity and offensiveness all influence constructs of *social acceptability,* although not necessarily *risk*. Just because something was offensive or bad, did not always mean it was given a high-risk category, or that there were any perceived consequences for the behaviour (more detail in Chapter 6). This was echoed in responses to homophobic sentiment in posts E ("I'm sick to death of ***ing dykes…") and H ("Peter: You are GAY…") and misogynistic rape culture/victim blaming C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say no…"):

"Offensive." [SB7E]

"It is offensive" [BH10E]

"A bit rude" [SB8E]

"Being quite rude about the fact that he's gay" [BH7H]

"Insulting. Not respecting their privacy, and what they like [sexuality]" [BH9H];

"Bit rude. Offensive" [SB8C]

"Just a bit out of order. Shouldn't say it" [BH8C]

"It's really bad to say that." [BHBC]

"It's really bad" [BH9C]

"So nasty" [BH10C]

What is clear from the responses is that how 'bad' or 'offensive' a post is considered to be is important for participants' assessment processes, at least in terms of social boundaries, but not necessarily legal and criminal boundaries. What is less clear is what participants actually mean by these terms, and how something was judged as being 'bad' or 'offensive': Is 'offensive content' the same things as 'content that causes offense'? It seems that this was highly subjective among students. Offence (or, specifically, a *lack of* offense) was very much a part of students' justifications for downgrading the risk of a post. For example:

"Not offensive" [SB8B]

"Nothing offensive" [BH8B]

"Not really offending anyone" [BH9B]

"Doesn't offend anyone" [BH13B]

"It's not really offensive" [BH10I]

"It's not offensive" [BH8L]

A number of youth studies relating to social media highlight 'offensive content' as being an issue, but similar to 'cyberbullying' and 'inappropriate content', definitions of this remain somewhat vague (James et al, 2009; Cesaroni et al, 2012; Ofcom, 2014; 2017). Results from this study support research by Smahel and Wright (2014: 81), in terms of demonstrating the frequency with which 'offensive' is used as part of young people's vocabulary, and in moral assessments of online conduct and content. Similarly, students' assessments of what was rude, disrespectful, bad (or not) sometimes correlated with assessments of risk, but at other times varied wildly (most notably, Post G: "You gotta watch this video of Alice…"). Conflicting perspectives and contradictions in terms of what was considered 'bad' or 'not so bad' by students also

appeared in response to a number of other examples. Just as racism seems to be perceived as something operating on a scale or spectrum, there appears to be a scale of how 'bad' or 'offensive' content can be perceived to be. At times, there was complete disagreement as to where the same content ought to sit on this 'offence scale', even amongst the same groups. This was especially the case with regard to posts that appeared to target a particular group or individual, with almost completely contradictory assessments of how 'bad' or offensive this material was. For example:

Post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say no…"):

"Disgusting. Should be put in prison" [SB13C]

"It's wrong" [SB7C]

"It's really bad to say that [BH9C]

"You shouldn't put something like that on social media" [BH7C]

"Just think he's stupid to say it" [BH10C]

"Bit controversial" [BH12C]

"Just a bit out of order [BH8C]

Post E ("I'm sick to death of ***ing dykes…"):

"Quite bad" [BH12E]

"Just a bit rude" [SB8E]

"It's not too extreme" [BH8E]

"Not serious" [BH9E]

"It is offensive, but not a threat to anyone" [BH10E]

Post H ("Peter: you are GAY…"):

"Being quite rude" [SB7H]

"Insulting" [BH9H]

"Not a nice way of saying it [that someone is gay] [SB8H]

"It's not anything bad" [BH8H]

"Not an insult, not offensive [BH10H]

Post J ("Beyoncé is nothing…"):

"Really offensive" [BH10J]

"Quite racist. Offensive" [BH13J]

"Being rude and disrespectful, but not a lot to get you into trouble" [SB8J]

"Not, like, over the top… They just don't like her" [SBJ7]

"Not bad for a celebrity" [SB13J]

"Not bad enough to be red" [SB7J]

Participants also highlight the subjective nature of 'offence' as a key factor when imagining the potential impact upon others, such as a recipient of a post:

"It could offend people, like teachers, or parents, or the students" [BH10K]

"If you have friends who are lesbians, you'd upset them" [SB8E]

"Could be offensive if he's not gay" [BH12H]

"If they are gay then that's quite offensive. If they're not gay, that's also quite offensive" [BH9H]

One of the major themes among the literature on adolescent bullying – including online - is that of 'moral disengagement'; essentially, the extent to which young people are argued to lack empathy with victims when either perpetrating or witnessing abuse, with encouragement of 'moral engagement' therefore positioned as the 'solution' to this problem (Pornari, & Wood, 2010; Talwar et al, 2014; Kyriacou and Zuin, 2016; Cowie and Myers, 2018). This is somewhat similar to theories of Techniques of Neturalisation, as offenders are expected to relinquish denial, accept responsibility, and show remorse as evidence of 'rehabilitation' or 'recovery' (Maruna and Copes, 2005). I would strongly argue, however, that justification of problematic behaviour is not always a problem of 'moral disengagement'. Participants in this study – even those defending abusive content – do not always present as failing to engage

on a moral level, nor as having an inability to empathise with others. Rather, they differ in terms of *how* "morally reprehensible, *how* threatening, and *how* severe they consider a particular norm violation to be, and how much responsibility and guilt they ascribe to the harm-doer" (Gollwitzer and Bücklein, 2007: 458). This may be informed by tacit knowledge, previous experience or individual positioning, in terms of whether the post relates to an 'issue' or 'group' they feel strongly about. Overall, responses indicate a range of subjective perspectives on morality and risk, rather than 'disengagement'. Future research could further investigate whether, much like the concept of 'risk hierarchies' (discussed in Chapter 1), there are in fact 'moral hierarchies' at work here, where the 'lesser of many evils' are given lower priority and therefore generate less concern.

Overall, this study supports existing research showing that children may interpret the same language and behaviours very differently, and particularly when 'offensive' terms or insults are used within friendship groups: what a victim may deem upsetting, a perpetrator may view as harmless; what an adult outsider may view as unacceptable, a group of peers might view as 'regular' or normal (Cassidy et al, 2009; Talwar et al 2014; Shariff, 2015). There are important implications of this within wider moral and legal debates around constructions of freedom of speech in balance with protections from abuse online. While some have argued that concepts of freedom of speech have *always* included limits, namely hate speech (Warburton, 2009), others express concern over a perceived 'chill effect' on free speech being exacerbated by increased 'willingness to take offence' (Fox, 2016). There is some suggestion among the participants' responses of a perceived 'likelihood to offend':

> *"It might offend some people, but it's still okay. Saying 'Man City is a bad football team' will offend someone' [BH10K]*

> *"Obviously it could still be offensive. I mean, you shouldn't say it, but… [shrugs as if to say 'no big deal]" [BH13H]*

Some of these comments suggest that 'offending someone' is perhaps somewhat inevitable, apparently contrasting with most students' responses, which displayed negative judgements of 'disrespectful', 'offensive' or 'rude' messages. However, it is possible to make sense of some of these viewpoints through use of Matza and Sykes' (1961) concept of 'subterranean values'. They argue youth deviance ('juvenile delinquency') should not be characterised in contrast to the rest of society's values, but rather by *similarity* with them: "the search for kicks, the disdain of work, and a

desire for the big score", specifically (1961: 715). With this framework in mind, it could then be argued that students' responses represent an attempt to adhere to, rather than subvert, constructs of what is 'valued' in society. Ironically, people like Fox (2016) do not seem remotely discouraged by the likelihood of offending others with their speech, which slightly undermines her argument of concern about a 'chill effect'. Rather, it seems the opposite is true: Individuals who are outspoken, controversial even, and who appear unaffected by others' negative perceptions of them, amass huge amounts of followers and fame online, perhaps partly due to the concept of an 'attention economy' (Marwick, 2015; Salter, 2017. See also: discussion of Milo Yiannopoulos and the 'trolling playbook', Holiday, 2017).

For many young people growing up in the digital age, attention (in the form of followers, likes, shares etc.) has therefore become a kind of 'currency' in the online environment - a symbol of success. Considerations of personal identity, or 'brand', may trump concerns over offending others, echoing theories of an individualised culture encouraging reflexive biographies of the self (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). In mimicking celebrity culture, where one is the star of one's own social media profile, it may be that the responsibility is being reconstructed: a potentially offended audience is responsibilised to 'unfollow' if they don't like someone's comments, as opposed to a sender being 'responsible' for considering the impact on an audience of what they post. It may be that shifting constructs of responsibility and morality among young participants do not result from a *lack* of social guidance, role models or values (as some suggest, see: Palasinski, 2013), but rather from attempts to mimic celebrities, politicians, and others who benefit from an attention economy[13].

A final emerging theme from both the literature on risk and deviance, and from student responses in this study, is that of moral judgements extending to *people* as well as behaviours (Becker, 1967; Lupton, 1999a). Labels of 'risky' or 'deviant' can extend to include not just individuals, but entire groups: "the stranger, the homeless person, the Traveller/Gypsy and the gay lesbian or transgender individual", and perhaps particularly relevant to this context, the 'online troll' (Lupton, 2013: 640). This notion is heavily interconnected with constructs of 'self' and 'otherness' (Douglass, 1992; 2002). The process of assessing the risk of online content clearly involves, for some students, constructing an imagined 'sender', along with their character and motivations:

[13] At the time of writing, during continued educational workshops in schools, Donald Trump remains the single most common example cited by students for why they do *not* think there will be any negative consequences for content they post on social media.

"Just being a drama queen" [BH10B]

"Just want attention" [BH12B]

"Just think he's stupid to say it [BH10C]

"He's just frustrated" [BH10E]

"Whoever wrote it is just jealous" [BH8J]

"Sounds like a bully" [SB7F]

These constructions do not clearly constitute moral condemnations, however, as many were employed by students as neutralisations - essentially arguments and excuses for *downgrading* the risk of the post. This contradicts the idea that adolescents who defend or excuse online abuse are lacking in moral engagement or empathy, but rather suggests there is a potentially an empathic construction of the sender (empathic in the sense of imagining how they might be thinking and feeling, but without necessarily sympathising or approving). In a similar study using vignettes to assess children's moral and emotional perceptions of bullying, negative emotions such as 'shame' and 'worry' were associated with victims and bystanders, while 'pride' and 'indifference' were associated with bullies (Jennifer and Cowie, 2012). It may be that older children are able to empathise with and articulate a wider range of emotions that could provoke online outbursts, including negative ones such as jealousy, frustration, and a desire for attention. Not all emotions in response to norm violations perform the same social functions; some, such as disgust, are argued to be more likely to *decrease* empathy and *increase* a desire to punish, compared with righteous anger, for example (Dubreil, 2010). Paying attention to the emotional responses to deviant or risky behaviour allows for deeper consideration of issues such as justice, punishment and recompense.

Existing studies claim to show that younger students tend be 'more empathic' and 'less tolerant' of bullying and bullies (Menesini, Sanchez, Fonzi, Ortega, Costabile and Lo Feudo, 2003; Shariff, 2015). However, this 'tolerance' of bullies exhibited among older students may not necessarily stem from a lack of empathy for victims, as perhaps a developed ability to empathise with a perpetrator, and articulate how those negative emotions might lead to unwanted behaviours. It is possible that empathising with an offender might constitute a technique of 'Appeal to Higher Loyalties' (Sykes and Matza, 1957), or more simply a consideration of 'both sides of a story'.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the conceptualised 'initial stage' of constructing risk, namely how participants' labelling processes (be that use of legal terminology, moral and emotional responses, or interpretation of meaning) contributed to risk assessments of the example posts. Among the factors perceived to mitigate or downgrade the risk of online posts were ambiguity or uncertainty of 'meaning'; uncertainty of sender intention; lack of perceived 'seriousness' of meaning; lack of offence caused, or only an inevitable amount of 'mild' offence. Among the factors viewed as potentially aggravating the risk, were: certainty or clarity of meaning; inclusion of explicit or inferred threats of violence; reference to immoral or violent acts (such as rape or paedophilia); recognition and diagnoses of legal concepts (such as hate speech or racism); perceived 'truth' or 'seriousness' of a message; as well as offensive or prejudiced language or sentiment.

Some key points of interest for the findings include the fact that messages that were homophobic in sentiment were not as clearly condemned or viewed as risky compared with racist posts, and sexist/misogynistic posts even less so. Awareness of legal concepts among some participants demonstrate a surprising level of understanding and knowledge, while other key terminology (e.g. 'harassment', 'sexism' or 'sexting') were noticeably absent. The confusion over the legal risks of some posts (e.g post G: "You gotta watch this video of Alice…") present some serious concerns, which will be explored in more depth throughout this thesis. The notion of offence was highly subjective, with students differing greatly in terms of what kinds of content they considered morally 'bad' or offensive. There was disagreement as to whether causing offence ought to be considered risky, or whether this is somewhat inevitable and excusable. Finally, the finding that emotional and moral judgement of a sender did not always correlate with increased perceptions of risk, and that emotional considerations (empathy) at times actually led to a *defence* or *dismissal of risk* to the sender. The following chapter will therefore specifically focus on processes of contextualising the actors involved, and how this affects risk perceptions. It will examine issues such as whether content is generalised or targeted at a specific individual or group, consider the sender-subject relationship in terms of proximity, power and status, and the processes of ascribing responsibility to a sender and/or subject, and how these all have an effect on students' risk ratings.

CHAPTER FOUR: Relationships, power, proximity and status

Introduction

The literature highlights how risk is very much socially situated, making the relationship between actors involved in social media interaction worthy of study in relation to perceptions of online risk. Theoretically, the chapter will draw from the three main approaches to considering risk. The Cultural/Symbolic approach is useful as it emphasises micro social and cultural contexts play a vital role in constructions of risk, which tend to be rooted in collective or shared assumptions within groups (Douglas, 1992; Lupton 1999). The 'Risk Society' approach is useful for exploring potentially negative emotions associated with risk (e.g. anxiety, confusion, uncertainty), which Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) remind us may be collectively constructed but *experienced* individually. Theories of individualisation and responsibilisation are hugely relevant to how we construct responsibility, as well as risk, and this is relevant to consideration of situations with multiple potential actors. The Governmentality approach highlights how cultural discourses can influence our attempts to 'self-manage' risk, and adheres to constructs of the 'ideal' neoliberal citizen (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996a). This chapter will focus primarily upon participants' imagined relationship between social actors – namely 'senders' and 'subjects/recipients' of the example posts – exploring how proximity, power and status influence their constructs of both risk and responsibility.

Empirical studies have also emphasised how trust, intimacy and friendship play a role in young people's constructs of risk, including in a digital context (Pilkington, 2007; Mishna et al, 2009; Gabriel, 2014). Cyberbullying is sometimes assumed to be a 'youth' phenomenon, however Pyzalski's (2012) study shows cyber aggression is not always peer-to-peer, with young participants reporting that people known 'only' from the Internet were the most likely to be targeted. Olweus (2012) emphasises that one of the key features of cyberbullying behaviour is 'power imbalances between perpetrators and victims' (Olweus, 2012). This has led to studies investigating cyberbullying exploring how the relationship between - and status of - aggressors and targets may affect young people's moral evaluations of the behaviour (Cassidy et al, 2009; Talwar et al, 2014). Social status can be tricky to assess in an online context due to the potential for online anonymity (Suler, 2004), although it seems likely that pre-existing power inequalities, such as race, gender, etc. are upheld rather than subverted within online environments (Cesaroni et al, 2012; Shariff, 2015; Salter, 2017). The use of stimuli example posts in this study are deliberately devoid of

contextual information, allowing participants' to bring their own perspectives to the discussion, elaborating on either hypothetical scenarios or previous experiences to explain their assessments of risk. This is also in keeping with an inductive or iterative approach to research, rather than a deductive 'testing' of hypothesis (Chapter 2).

4.1. Tagging, targeting and identification

One of the common themes emerging from the data was the frequency with which participants' highlighted the 'naming' or 'tagging' of a target within a post. 'Tagging' is a term for when a person's social media account is essentially linked to within the message (usually indicated by a @ sign), and they are generally notified whenever they have been tagged in a post. It is used a way of referencing a subject, so that the audience (and the subject) are aware about specifically who is being discussed. It must be accurate to the subject's username however, which can create problems if two or more users share the same name (see: Horton, 2017).

This process of either identifying someone or deliberately directing content towards a subject was viewed among participants as something that might increase the potential risk to the sender. Equally, 'indirect' messages that did not identify subjects or 'tag' them were viewed as less risky. However, there were various different reasons for this, which will be explored within the following sections. It is common for laws governing publication of content (including on social media) to include provisions for the protection of certain groups or individuals, meaning that identification online (deliberately or inadvertently) can pose a serious legal risk to users. Participants' discussions of the risks of identifying subjects within the example social media posts will therefore also be considered within legal frameworks, as a useful point of comparison between the 'macro' and 'micro' social contexts influencing risk.

a. Identifying sex victims

A few students indicated they felt there was risk involved in naming individuals when the posts related to sexual offences or sexual content, such as post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk…"):

> *"No names, but could get you in trouble" [SB8C]*

> *"They haven't named anyone so [YELLOW]" [BH9C]*

It is unclear whether students' perception of risk relates to the naming of an alleged offender or victim in this case. There is currently no legal provision for anonymity for

alleged sexual offenders, with the exception of teachers accused of crimes against their pupils, as previously mentioned (Education Act 2011). A report by MPs in 2015 argued that all sexual offences *suspects* ought to have the right to remain anonymous until charged, something that was highly criticised by groups representing victims and survivors of sexual abuse (BBC News, 2015c). There is a legal right to anonymity for all sexual offence claimants in England however; The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992 outlines entitlement to automatic and lifelong anonymity, with rare exceptions including if individuals voluntarily waive this. What constitutes a sexual offence is outlined in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, but legal amendments have extended this provision to include victims of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and victims of trafficking (Serious Crime Act 2015; Modern Slavery Act 2015). It is important to note the Act specifically forbids *identification*, and does not necessarily require someone to be named:

> "Neither the name nor address, and no still or moving picture... No matter [i.e. material or information] likely to lead members of the public to identify a person as the person against whom the offence is alleged to have been committed… is to be published in England and Wales in a written publication available to the public" (Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992)

Notably absent are any identity protections for victims of image-based sexual abuse (also known as 'revenge porn'). This is a criminal offence, but not considered a 'sexual offence' per se (section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015). Legal scholars are pushing for this to be amended (McGlynn et al, 2017; McGlynn, 2017). This 'gap' in the law is particularly relevant to example post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"). Participants did occasionally touch on the theme of 'identification' during discussions of risk with this post:

> *"Alice could sue, if he named her" [BH12G]*

> *"They've not tagged someone" [BH7G]*

None of the participants specifically highlighted an identification risk of 'Alice' as a child victim of crime: "Where the images may have been taken when the victim was under 18, prosecutors will consider offences under the Protection of Children Act 1978" (CPS, 2015). If under 18, 'Alice' therefore constitutes a child victim of crime, meaning anonymity restrictions could apply. This aspect of underage 'sexting'/'revenge porn' highlights a confusion and contradiction in how the law in

principle fails to apply in practice: Creation, possession or distribution of sexual content of children is considered a criminal offence, yet children who are victims of this kind of crime rarely obtain anonymity in practice. It is perhaps more likely for those (particularly girls) who are victimised to be 'infamous' as opposed to anonymous among peers, as empirical research with young people shows this kind of material is often distributed with impunity – or even as part of an active process of 'public shaming' (Ringrose et al, 2012; Salter, 2017). In this sense, the policing of gender and sexuality perhaps upholds the existing moral and social 'order', and do not seem as so much of a 'risk' as an act retribution/retaliation (Douglas, 2002). This will be explored further in the sections on 'responsibility' later in this chapter.

The primary risk category participants associated with sharing the video of 'Alice' was civil; this may be partly influenced by news media coverage of 'revenge porn', which tends to focus on female celebrity victims and litigious consequences (see: Christie and Robinson, 2014; Khanal, 2016; BBC Newsbeat, 2017). Participant responses focused mostly on the risk of lawsuits (e.g. for damage to reputation of the victim or breach of privacy of the victim), whereas the criminal aspect of sharing indecent images without consent, or identifying a sex victim, was not so prominent. This perhaps suggests that an *individual* potentially seeking recourse for victimisation may be viewed as more likely than police intervention for this kind of behaviour. The 'individualisation' of risk management responsibilities, in particular, the theme of the victim who actively 'self-seeks' justice, is one that will be developed further throughout this research (Giddens, 1991; 1999; Beck, 1992).

b. Identifying child victims

In relation to naming those linked with criminal offences, there are legal provisions also to protect the identity of children involved in criminal proceedings, whether as victims, witnesses or defendants. Automatic restrictions apply to the identification of under-18s involved in Youth court proceedings (section 49 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933) and judges can issue court orders protecting under-18s at Magistrates and Criminal courts (section 45 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999). These are life-long for witnesses and victims under 18, but tend to expire at 18 for defendants. There can be exceptions when judges deem it in the public interest or within the rights of young offenders for anonymity to be in place for life (for example: Farmer and Mortimer, 2016). A government commissioned report published in December 2016 recommended all child convictions and cautions should

be “non-disclosable” once spent (Taylor, 2016: 26). Reporting restrictions apply to all publishers, not only the news media:

> "Any speech, writing, relevant programme or other communication in whatever form which is addressed to the public at large or any section of the public. This wide definition therefore includes any posts on Social Media including Facebook, Twitter, etc.” (Section 63 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999)

Post I also includes named reference to an alleged child sex victim (“Jenny is a right slag…”) During discussions, participants expressed a perceptions that this post was far more likely to be ‘risky’ because of the fact that individuals were named/identified:

> *“[Its] giving away the name of who it is. Isn't that illegal?”* [BH9I]

> *“If it's not true then it's naming and shaming the girl and the teacher, his reputation would be ruined”* [BH9I]

> *“[R] Because you’ve given out the names of people doing a crime”* [BH9I]

> *“[O] As it names Mr Sanders”* [BH13I]

However, most of the responses indicate concern for identifying the alleged *offender* - ‘Mr Sanders’ - rather than the alleged victim, ‘Jenny’. To some extent this aligns with protections under section 13 of the Education Act 2011, and one student did highlight the concept of ‘Contempt of Court’ (affecting Article 6 HRA):

> *“Because you're involving him, Mr Sanders. If a jury sees it, it could sway them not to give him a fair trial”* [BH10I].

The Contempt of Court Act 1981 states publications may be treated as contempt of court if they “interfere with the course of justice in particular proceedings” by creating a “substantial risk” that the proceedings will be “seriously impeded or prejudiced”. If, theoretically, an arrest had been made in relation to this allegation then a post like this (alleging guilt) would breach criminal law. As with post G, the most common risk category associated with posting this was a ‘civil’ risk, suggesting primary concern is for Mr Sanders and his reputation. The construction of this risk (possibly libelling a teacher as a primary risk concern over that of identifying a child sex victim) will be considered more closely within the section of power and status (age), later in this chapter.

c. Defamation (libel)

Defamation is a civil offence associated with publishing material that is likely to cause serious harm to an individual's reputation and is not justifiably (i.e. provably) true. Libel represents the published or recorded form of this, while slander is the verbal. One potential defence to accusations of libel is that the claimant is *not identifiable* from the content, meaning allegations involving a named or photographed individual are generally more risky (Defamation Act 2013). As discussed, however, individuals don't have to be *named* to be identifiable; mentioning place of employment, job title, or nicknames is also risky. Libellous claims about deliberately 'unnamed' individuals can also present a legal risk: In 2006, Ashley Cole sued the News of the World for running a story about 'unnamed footballers' involved in a "gay sex romp", claiming he'd been wrongly identified by 'insinuation and innuendo' (Muir, 2006). In this sense, implicit allegations can be just as risky. Defaming someone who is a suspect in an ongoing criminal investigation (in a way that undermines their right to a fair trial, so 'character assassination' or linking them to criminality) can also constitute Contempt of Court – a criminal offence.

Participants demonstrated some perception of the risk of civil litigation for defamation being associated linked with 'naming' individuals or organisations online:

"Not named anyone so he [the sender] can't be sued" [BH12C]

"Sued if it was about someone in particular" [BH8C]

"College could sue for saying its bad" [BH8K]

This was not only the case for defamatory allegations, but (somewhat strangely) for threatening posts, too. Participants' comments seem to indicate that the 'naming' or 'tagging' of a subject meant that threats or abuse were more 'targeted' or 'direct', and therefore riskier:

"Not at an individual, no target" [SB13K]

"The person it's aimed at could sue?" [SB7F]

"Mentioned Heathrow airport" [BH10D]

"Tagged Heathrow airport" [BH12D]

"Threatening, but it doesn't mention anyone. Not at anyone." [SB13E]

"Not a direct threat, more general" [BH13E]

The risks of identification appear, once again, to be associated with civil litigation, rather than criminality. As suggested with responses to post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"), this may indicate a perception that suing via the civil courts is a more likely mode of recourse than police intervention, which will be considered in full detail in Chapter 6 ('Formal Consequences'). It is also possible that students are simply unsure of the threshold for criminal offences regarding social media and therefore tend to lean towards civil damages as the most likely consequence, even in the case of threats. The sample for this research may also perhaps be more aware of the civil risks of defamatory content online because of the schools they attend (see Chapter 2).

d. Threats and Hate Speech

Sending threats - including via social media - presents a criminal risk, due to a number of intersecting pieces of legislation. When it comes to 'threats to kill', "the defendant does not have to have the intention to kill, but there has to be an intent that the person to whom the threat has been issued would *fear* it would be carried out" (S16 of the Offences Against the Person Act, 1861 – my emphasis). Communications that put someone "in fear of violence", or "serious alarm or distress" are also illegal (Protection from Harassment Act 1997). More commonly threats sent via social media are prosecuted as communications offences (e.g. "the sending of an electronic communication which conveys a threat" under s1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 or "the sending of messages of a 'menacing character'" under s127 of the Communications Act 2003). Threatening and menacing communications targeting specific individuals on social media are generally judged in terms of the intended effect upon the victim (what it is or is likely to be) (CPS, 2018).

These are generally categorised as offences 'targeting individuals', however whether a victim is actually named or 'tagged' could be somewhat irrelevant. For example, post F ("Waiting at the gates for my little friend. This time he won't even be able to walk once I'm finished") could be criminally risky if a victim:

- Was intended or likely to see the message,
- Knew "my little friend" was a reference to them,
- Believed the threat to be serious, i.e. causing genuine fear.

Specifically in response to post F there was some disagreement among participants as to whether it constituted a 'direct' threat, due to the nature of online communication:

"It's not directed at a specific person" [SB7F]

"[O] [They're] not actually saying it to his face [BH7F]

"[R] - It's a direct threat" [BH10F]

Responses to other example posts also highlight that the risk was generally perceived to be higher if communication was directed 'at' someone, or tagged someone, and 'indirect' communication was less risky:

"Not directed at anyone" [BH12C]

"If you tagged someone then you could get sued, but if not it's just more general, so yellow" [BH9E]

This shows some evidence to support arguments that online or computer mediated communication may not be perceived in the same way as face to face interaction; 'online disinhibition' is a theory that attempts to account for why aggressive, threatening or offensive content is so pervasive on social media (Suler, 2004; Barlett, 2014). To some extent, the process of 'tagging' a subject perhaps represents saying something 'to their face' with the intention of them seeing it and perhaps also responding; the cyber equivalent of 'squaring up' to someone. Indirect or untagged posts are therefore seen as less confrontational, less threatening/menacing, and therefore less risky. This is also perhaps related to the construction that 'speech' is not the same as 'action'; saying something *to* someone online carries more symbolic weight than posting words *about* someone (more on this in 'words vs. actions' section of Chapter 5).

Participants' discussions indicate a heightened perception of risk when offensive or threatening content targeted a group, as well as individuals:

"It's a threat to a type of person" [SB8E]

"Red because it's a threat to a specific group of people" [BH9E]

"It's not really against a group though" [BH8C]

This suggests some awareness of the concept of 'hate speech' and protected identity groups (see Chapter 3). The Cultural/Symbolic approach asserts that conceptualisations of 'Self' and the 'Other'; i.e. identification within or outside of groups - and maintaining the boundaries between them – as central to risk discourses, often mirroring talk of pollution, contamination or taboo (Douglas, 1992; 2002). Tagging and targeting specific groups (on the basis of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) raises questions about the risk distinctions between posts *about* a group (positioning them as separate, an 'other', during communication within one's own group) versus talking 'at' or 'to' them (i.e. *addressing them directly*). In legal terms, hate speech offences relate to distribution of material (regardless of the intended audience), however, socially, culturally and morally speaking, there may be a distinction between the two in terms of risk. Offensive, abusive and hateful content 'about' groups may not be considered as risky as content targeted 'at' said groups, as those symbolic boundaries between the 'us' and 'them' have been maintained.

There was some suggestion among participants that even for hateful, abusive or threatening communications, a group civil lawsuit would be the most likely risk, rather than any kind of police intervention:

> *"Could be sued by the Gurkhas" [BH9A]*
>
> *"Get sued – by lesbians" [SB7E]*
>
> *"Could be sued? [O] [I prompt 'by who?'] By all lesbians? [This gets a giggle/laugh from others]"*

While group lawsuits are possible, this would not be an appropriate or even likely outcome for racist or homophobic messages constituting hate speech. Once again, a common theme emerging among responses is that civil litigation is the most likely risk, even when the behaviour may be criminal. It could be that participants feel the content is too serious to be purely a social (Yellow) risk, yet not serious enough to be criminal (Red), and therefore simply opt for the category 'in-between', which is perhaps a flaw in the use of a traffic light system as part of the methodology (see Chapter 2). It may also be that state interventions (i.e. police or the CPS) is viewed as a less likely outcome than being sued. Both the 'Risk Society' and 'Governmentality' approaches to theorising risk draw attention to the increasing *privatisation* of risk, with the responsibility for management shifting from state to the individual in the modern age (Giddens, 1999: 5; Rose, 1996a). The notion that individual litigation might be

more likely than (or even preferably to) police intervention will be discussed in more depth within Chapter 6 ('Imagining Consequences').

Overall, the 'naming' or 'tagging' is viewed generally to increase the risk of a post, perhaps due to increasing the intensity of the message impact (by 'directly targeting' it) or the symbolic distance between a sender and a subject. This leads me onto discussions of proximity and relationship between senders and subjects, and how imagined aspects of this influenced participants' constructs of risk.

4.2. Relationships and proximity

Issues of trust and 'mutually accountability' are important aspects of risk (Douglas, 2002; Pilkington, 2007; Barbovschi et al, 2013) and no doubt deviance too - hence the expression, 'partners in crime' indicating closeness or intimacy. Within criminology, the volume, strength and nature of social bonds have been argued to play a role in both preventing deviance (Hirschi, 1969/2002) and encouraging it (Sutherland, 1939). While cyberbullying research tends to focus upon peer-to-peer offending, research shows a significant proportion of young people may use the Internet to target people entirely unknown to them (Dowell, Burgess and Cavanaugh, 2009). Pyzalski's (2012) typography explores differences in perpetrator-victim relationships, with 'targets' of cyber aggression listed in order of most to least prevalent among adolescents:

1. People known only from the Internet (42.5%)
2. Young people known offline, but not close friends (39%)
3. Close friends (26.8%)
4. Random persons/totally unknown (24.2%)
5. Former girlfriend/boyfriend (16.9%)
6. Not individuals but groups, e.g. fans of a certain band or football team (15.9%)
7. Celebrities, e.g. actors, singers (11.1%)
8. People like the homeless, alcoholics, etc. (10.8%)
9. Teachers (9%)
10. Other known adults (8.9%)

These results show that young people may be just as likely to target 'random' people online, as much as those they know or are close to offline. What is also interesting to note from this study is the notion of status; although this cannot be evidenced by the data as the categories did not specify, it seems possible that 'other young people'

perhaps occupy the positions of most likely targets, with 'adults' being less likely to be targeted. Themes of power and status will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

The lack of contextual information for participants in this research meant that both the target *and the sender* could be constructed entirely at the imagination of the participants, due to the open nature of the example posts (Chapter 2). Clearly the notion of *who* is posting content affects perceptions of risk, as this quote demonstrates in response to Post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"):

> *"If Alice is a child and it's an old man posting it then [R] red, but if it's between two friends, like a joke, then yellow*" [BH13G]

As theories of the sociology of deviance assert, this shows how the exact same behaviours can be perceived in completely different ways when eancted by different people in different situations (Erikson, 1962; Becker 1973). These particular 'actors' ('old man and a child', vs. 'between two friends') also bring to mind media constructs of 'ideal victims and offenders'; the innocent young girl and the dirty old man is an cultural trope that is easy for people to recognise and label as criminal/problematic (Christie, 1986; Madriz, 1997; Jewkes, 2011). Far from being harmless, the re-production of these stereotypes may exacerbate myths about sex crimes, such as notions of 'stranger danger', childhood 'innocence', and the idea that offenders must be 'weirdos', rather than partners, close friends, or respected pillars of the community (Kitzinger, 1988; Greer and McLaughlin, 2013). It seems from this response that peer perpetration of image-based sexual abuse may not be perceived or problematised in the same way as adult-perpetrated abuse. This supports findings from other studies into youth sexting in terms of how peer perpetration can be downplayed or normalised (Ringrose et al, 2012; Gabriel, 2014; Salter, 2017). In this case, a perpetrator's perceived 'distance' (in both a literal social sense and culturally, i.e. age and gender) from the subject is viewed as contributing to the riskiness of the act. In this case, a 'friend' was not thought to risk any repercussions beyond the purely social for sharing this video.

Social, emotional and cultural 'distance' from a target also emerged as a potential *mitigating* risk factor among participants. In the case of posts B ("I'M SO UPSET…") and J ("Beyoncé is nothing…"), where celebrities are mentioned, participants tended to positioned them as unlikely to be affected by the posts:

"Zayn won't see it" [SB8B]

"Beyoncé won't care, she's a celebrity. It's not the same as if you said it to a friend. She won't see it" [BH13J]

"Might not be the famous one, could be another Beyoncé" [BH9J]

It suggests that when the target of offensive posts is further removed from the sender, at least in the case of the celebrities, the risk was reduced. In the case of celebrities, this may have more to do with status than proximity (discussed later in this chapter). In some cases, closer proximity was seen to mitigate risk because of the accompanying 'knowledge' it provided. Some posts were viewed as less risky because a sender might have 'insider' (i.e. tacit) knowledge of a person or situation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Wolfinger, 2002):

"Might be orange if you know that they're bad or if you'd be abused by them [Gurkhas]" [BH7A]

"What if the person can't walk ['is disabled'] or WANTS to do it? Maybe it's his or her son and they're in a wheelchair?" [SB8F]

"Might mean something else, not literal, just like an inside joke or a code" [BH12F]

Here, 'knowing' a person, and/or the context for a message, is a constructed as a neutralising risk factor. This provides some support for Sykes and Matza's (1957: 668) theory of techniques of neutralisation, where 'Denial of the Victim' is characterised by "an insistence that the injury is not wrong in light of the circumstances". With peer-to-peer perpetration of image based sexual abuse, this could also constitute a Denial of Injury; the act itself is not viewed as harmful if it is 'between friends'. Being metaphorically 'close' to the target or having 'insider' knowledge is perceived as reducing the risks. The notion of 'friends' or 'partners' as a target for social media abuse also emerged from many of the student discussions, similar to Pyzalski's study (2012):

"Could be a sexual partner?" [BH13F]

"Could be between friends?" [SB7G]

*"Being quite rude but [they're] friends" [*BH7H]

*"Depending on who it is, if its friends then [G]" [*BH13H]

Friends or partners are not only likely to be close to a sender in terms of a social sense (i.e. they have a relationship), but potentially also in terms of cultural similarities, such as age or interests. In the above responses, the existence of a relationship with a target is perceived to be a mitigating or neutralising factor by some participants, indicating that social norms and boundaries may differ when it comes to people who we know particularly well. Studies show that 'reciprocal banter' that may be unacceptable and offensive when directed at strangers can conversely help to *strengthen* social ties within existing friendship groups (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson & Waterhouse 2012). "Within young people's own peer groups there are unwritten boundaries of conformity and compliance", which may confound adult 'outsiders' observing from a cultural distance (Shariff, 2015: 142; Best, 2007). Despite that, in certain cases targeting friends was seen to *increase* the risk in the eyes of students, particularly if it involved homophobic or racist speech, such as posts E and J:

"If you have friends who are lesbians, you'd upset them" [by saying this]. [SB8E]

"[O], but if to a friend then [R]. [BH13J]

These responses imply that potentially offensive posts can be perceived as simultaneously 'more' or 'less' risky when they concern friends, partners or others within one's own social group; it simply depends on context. Group norms and boundaries can be a complicated arena of social interaction to navigate, with contradictory 'rules' about what is risky making tacit knowledge of paramount importance. What complicates online and social media interactions is the potential for group social boundaries to breakdown, with message content 'leaking' out to a potentially limitless social audience beyond, therefore increasing the risk (Douglas, 1986; 2002). Equally the act of 'juggling' of multiple identities, social contexts and relationships all at once increases the pressure for young people to rigorously 'self-manage' their online interactions and digital communications (boyd, 2014; Marwick and boyd, 2014a; 2014b). The relationship then must also consider Olweus' (2012) paradigm of bullying which highlights potential power imbalances as being key to assessing whether behaviour is 'bullying' or not, even between close peers. This

leads me to discuss how the status of an imagined sender or subject affects perceptions of risk among young participants.

4.3. Power and status

Researchers investigating cyberbullying consistently highlight power and status as being an important theme (e.g. Vaillencourt, McDougall, Hymel, Krygsman, Miller, Stiver and Davis, 2008; Lim, Vadrevu, Chan and Basnyat, 2012; Cesaroni et al, 2012; Navarro et al, 2015; Whitaker and Kowalski, 2015). Some even argue, "the *main purpose of* bullying behaviours is to undermine the social status of the victim… While at the same time raising the bully's self-esteem and social status" (Cantone, Piras, Vellante, Preti, Danielsdottir, D'Aloja, Lesinskiene, Angermeyer, Carta and Bhugra, 2015: 58 – my emphasis). Equally, research into youth sexting shows social standing is connected with pressures and drives to share indecent images (Lee and Crofts, 2015; Ringrose et al, 2012). Criminologists have also highlighted how certain behaviours may be excused among those with higher social status, but labelled deviant or criminalised when exhibited by those with lower social status (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Lemert, 1967; 1981; Taylor et al, 1973). Becker also acknowledges that there is inherent power and authority in being able to define what constitutes a social problem, as well potential 'solutions' (1967). Within the literature on risk, it is argued that a cultural/symbolic approach to analysis must acknowledge and include that which threatens the *status* of individuals and groups, as much as that which presents a literal or physical danger (Douglas, 1992; 2002; Lupton, 2013). For this reason, social status, power and inequalities were considered to be an important aspect of youth risk assessments to consider within this analysis. These have been divided into 'age' and 'fame' for discussion within this next section, as other inequalities (gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation) have been explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

<u>a. Age</u>

Childhood is "not just a psychological state, but also a social status - and a very lowly one at that", argues Jackson (1982: 26). Power imbalances between adults and children are arguably some of the most marked in existence, on both a global scale and within micro social structures, such as the family (Kitzinger, 1988; Jackson, 1982; Allen, 2005; Livingstone and Bulger, 2014; Muncie, 2014). It is therefore vital to explore how age, as a social factor, impacts participants' perceptions of risk and responsibility online. Responses to post I ("Jenny is a right slag…") are perhaps the most poignant to focus on, as this relates to allegations of a sexual relationship

between a pupil and a teacher. As previously highlighted, a common assumption among students was that the claims were 'not serious': lies, rumour or a joke. Participants express concern primarily in relation to the potential harm to the teacher (Mr Sanders) in this scenario:

> *"If it was true the person would get the teacher arrested. The person who sent it is abusing the situation" [SB8I]*
>
> *"You're putting the teacher's job at risk" [BH8I]*
>
> *"Could get the teacher arrested or lose his job" [BH9I]*
>
> *"Teacher could lose his job if it's true and also could sue if it's false" [BH9I]*
>
> *"Because you're calling the teacher a paedophile, they [police] would have to check that out" [BH9I]*
>
> *"You're saying the teacher is a paedophile… If a jury sees it, it could sway them not to give him a fair trial" [BH10I]*
>
> *"Harsh about the teacher" [BH12I]*
>
> *"He could get arrested, people thinking he's a paedophile and he's like 'I'm not'. Could ruin his life and lose his job" [BH12I]*
>
> *"Risk the teacher could lose his job" [SB13I]*

As discussed Chapter 3, it may be reasonable for students to assume the claims are false, and so it is perfectly legitimate to raise concern for the risk to the teacher's reputation, job and life. However, potential risks to 'Jenny', as an alleged child sex victim, seemed rather underrepresented among participant discussions. Risk to her specifically was mostly discussed in terms of her being in some way culpable or 'in trouble' if it were true:

> *"The teacher might be doing it with an underage girl and he could get arrested. The girl could be in trouble too" [BH7I]*
>
> *"Get Jenny into trouble, bad about Jenny" [SB8I]*
>
> *"It's not good to have a relationship with a teacher" [SB7I]*

It was reassuring that many students recognised a teacher-student relationship as problematic or illegal (and articulated as such). However, not one of the students specifically mentioned identifying 'Jenny' (as a child sexual offence claimant) as either as a legal risk, or a social, emotional or moral concern. In addition, the suggestion implied among participant responses was that allegations of this nature ought to remain undisclosed:

> *"It's not a good thing to say" [SB7I]*
>
> *"It's naming and shaming the girl and the teacher" [BH9I]*
>
> "*If it's true then it's not your business to post that" [BH9I]*
>
> *"[It's] personal information, but said to everyone" [BH12I]*
>
> *"The school or the head could sue because you're just making an accusation" [BH13I]*

Not one of the participants in this study discussed the idea that the allegations ought to be formally raised or referred to an adult. As such, when concluding the workshops, a considerable amount of time was spent emphasising the seriousness of these kinds of allegations and stressing the importance that any 'real life' rumours of teacher-student relations should be highlighted to an adult, in case they genuinely needed investigating[14]. Students were praised for recognising that social media would not be an appropriate forum to discuss these allegations, but were encouraged to report to school staff should they ever arise.

When considered altogether, the main features of students' responses to post I indicate that participants' risk discussions, firstly, placed concern primary towards potential risks to the teacher, with less concern for 'Jenny'. Secondly, implied culpability or wrongdoing on the part of 'Jenny', and a risk of her being 'in trouble' if this was discovered/disclosed. Finally, that despite the alleged relationship being acknowledged as problematic - even criminal - that disclosure would be a bad thing.

These perspectives bring pervasive adult-child power imbalances into sharp focus: Students prioritised the risk to the alleged (adult) abuser, while implying culpability on the part of the alleged (child) victim, as well as highlighting negative consequences (for everyone involved) if the relationship were publicly disclosed (a position that does

[14] This is in accordance with NSPCC safeguarding guidelines and ethical frameworks outlined by the researcher in Chapter 2.

not prioritise the safety of children). In light of these perspectives, it is not difficult to understand how institutional child sexual abuse manages to continue, and remain 'hidden', despite potentially widespread 'knowledge' of offending (McAlinden, 2006; Sullivan and Beech, 2002). Greer and McLaughlin (2013) argue that firstly *doubt over the reliability* of abuse allegations, and secondly, *fear of defaming alleged abusers* are two common factors preventing news organisations from publicly disclosing institutional abuse, even when it is a well-known 'open secret' among many. Findings from this research indicate that the very same fears and doubts may operate to prevent young people from reporting such allegations. In addition, children's perception of having the power to stop abuse and safeguard victims is likely to be far less than that of professional adults within the news media industry. This is a safeguarding concern that will be discussed in terms of future implications in the Conclusions chapter.

In contrast, Post F ("Waiting at the gates…") highlights risk perceptions relating to constructs of an 'older' (potentially adult) sender targeting a 'younger' (child) victim, and showed a reversal of the trend in responses to Post I:

> *"'Little friend' sounds like an older person towards a younger person" [BH7F]*
>
> *"'Little friend' suggests they're older." [BH9F]*
>
> *"Admitting they're a paedophile." [BH13F]*
>
> *"Phrases heavily implied children" [SB13F]*

Perceived power of a perpetrator, and/or vulnerability of a victim, is central to whether aggressive behaviour tends to be given a label of 'bullying' (Olweus, 2012; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalhom Fisher, Russel and Tippett, 2008). Here, the power imbalance between a constructed 'older' sender and 'younger' target was a factor that shifted student perceptions towards higher risk categories. As with post I (re: 'Jenny' and 'Mr Sanders') students interpreted the post to indicate an abusive, potentially criminal, sexual relationship between an adult and a child, however the responses to post F were somewhat different. As previously discussed, the menacing tone, or the speech being *directed at* the subject may be what increased participants' perceptions of risk. It is also possible that speech *from* someone in a more powerful position is what

affected risk perceptions, as the sender of example I is perhaps more likely to be constructed as a fellow pupil, rather than an adult.

Vulnerability and age of the subject were also key discussion points when assessing the risks of posting so-called 'revenge porn' (post G: "You gotta watch this video of Alice…"). Participants' perceptions of risk increased when they considered that 'Alice' could be younger:

> *"She could be under 18" [BH7G]*
>
> *"If it's porn you and they could be arrested if they're underage?" [SB8G]*
>
> *"Don't know the age of the girl, could be underage… If it's child pornography then [R], if they're under 16 or 18" [BH10G]*
>
> *"If she's over the age then depends on the video, if it's not very nice then [O]" [SB8G]*
>
> *"If you're 18 then it's fine, if underage then orange" [BH9G]*
>
> *"If she's underage then [R]. [I ask, what age] 16? 18?" [SB13G]*

These responses could partly be the result of media and schools' attention towards the risks of 'underage sexting'/'child pornography' (indecent images of under 18s), which has increased in the UK over recent years (Lee and Crofts, 2015; Ringrose et al, 2012; Phippen, 2012). In addition, there may be underlying moral, cultural and social judgements at work. The literature highlights how certain behaviours considered acceptable for adults (e.g. sex, smoking and drinking) are more likely to be labelled as 'risky' when exhibited by children (Austen, 2009; Jackson and Scott 1999). It is difficult, however, to judge to what extent students in this study genuinely perceive the sharing of sexual images of under 18s to be problematic or high risk. When taking into consideration that rates of underage sex in the UK are relatively high, and that sexting practices may be to some extent 'normal' among teens, it is certainly possible that students may *not* view this behaviour as particularly deviant or risky, but feel compelled to respond with the 'correct answer' when questioned by an adult on the topic (Lee and Crofts, 2015; Gabriel, 2014; Cowie, 2012).

Similarly, underage drinking was a feature of post L ("Ah, ****. Double science..."), with most participants willing to 'upgrade' the level of risk based on the age of the sender:

> *"If your age was under 14 or under 18 then [R]" [BH7L]*
>
> *"Depends on age. Older = [Y], Younger = [O] Because children aren't allowed to drink… [G] If they're older, like 18" [SB8L]*
>
> *"If too young [to drink], depends how old. [Y] if too young and [G] if older" [BH8L]*
>
> *"Or could be [R] red if drinking and you're at school. If you're at school and drinking it might be underage drinking" [BH9L]*
>
> *"If they're under 18 then it's underage drinking so [O] or [R]" [BH10L]*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the older students (aged 16-18) were far more likely to rate post L as less risky (social or no risk) than the younger students (see Appendix 1a). Responses suggest they would not perceive posting publicly about underage drinking as particularly risky:

> *"If underage then [Y] - If the teacher or parents saw it. Still a [G], even if underage, because they could've had a birthday party at the weekend, and had a couple of glasses of wine" [BH12L]*
>
> *"School wouldn't pick up on it. If you're like 13 then it's an issue" [BH13L]*
>
> *"If underage? If 16 that's quite young but everyone drinks in Year 11!" [SB13L]*

Constructions of risk and deviance appear to be different regarding underage drinking, compared with underage sexual content. Some of the attempts among the older students to neutralise or downgrade the risk of post L (drinking) were not used to attempt to justify post G (indecent images). Both potentially represent attempts to demonstrate maturity through the exhibition of 'adult' perceptions on underage sex and drinking; condemning the former and neutralising the latter as a way of adhering to social and moral norms. Culturally, 'underage drinking' is unlikely to be considered as risky or problematic as 'underage sexting'; especially while it's reported that smoking and drinking among young people in the UK are at an 'all time low' (Gayle,

2016). However, this may go beyond changing constructions of deviance and provide support for Douglas' conceptualisation of risk as relating to ideas about 'containment' and 'contamination' (1986; 1992; 2002). Much of the moral messaging and panic around sexual images of children is framed in terms of the potential for the images 'getting out', 'spreading', 'going viral', etc:

> "Whether uploaded voluntarily or through coercion and control, once published online, it is difficult to manage and remove content. Images can be replicated and circulated at an alarmingly fast rate. Self-generated child sexual images have the potential to remain online indefinitely where they can be shared among paedophile networks, used to blackmail, groom, exploit, harass, bully and humiliate the young person and even used to encourage the exploitation and abuse of others". (Jütte, 2016: 11. See also: Martin, 2013; Crawford, 2016)

The risk here is framed partly as a loss of control, particularly at the boundaries within which certain risky youth behaviours can be contained. In this sense, "a couple of glasses of wine" at "a birthday party at the weekend" is, of course, considered as far less risky behaviour for those aged under 18 then sharing indecent images [BH12L]. The digital age has potentially created a fundamental shift in terms of how (mis)behaviour among children can be contained and managed; the 'leakage' of risky content into the online world represents an uncontainable, limitless and potentially permanent risk that did not previously exist for childhood (Beck, 1992; Douglas 1986; 1992; 2002). Nevertheless, childhood 'innocence' and 'vulnerability' remain a pervasive dominant discourse, which the very act of challenging can be considered risky in and of itself (Kitzinger, 1988; Jackson 1982). Power to define and challenge where those boundaries between 'childhood' and 'adulthood' lie, for now, remains somewhat firmly in the hands of adults; parents, teachers and policy makers.

<u>b. Fame</u>

It was sometimes the case that participants felts that the fame or status of a subject was a factor that could increase the risk to the sender targeting them. This was particularly the case with example J ("Beyoncé is nothing but an ugly black slut. She should just ******ing jump off a building"):

> "*[O] because she is famous she could sue" [BH7J]*

"[Beyoncé] is well known so a [R] or an [O] - Whoever wrote it is just jealous" [BH8J]

"Might not be the famous one, could be another Beyoncé… if it's the famous one then she could sue" [BH9J]

Conversely, others argued the opposite:

"Beyoncé's people [staff] would just ignore it. She gets so many messages a day. She wouldn't read it. If she saw it she might sue, but chances of her seeing it are slim." [BH12J]

"Beyoncé won't care, she's a celebrity. It's not the same as if you said it to a friend. She won't see it" [BH13J]

There are two simultaneous constructions of risk in relation to power occurring here; the first implies celebrities may have greater access to resources, increasing the opportunity and likelihood of them engaging authorities (lawyers/police), pursuing their online attackers and obtaining justice/retribution. As the saying goes, 'don't pick fights you can't win'; the apparent logic is that if a sender targets someone with greater power and status, they are at higher risk of repercussions for their actions. Risk is increased due to the *power of the target* to retaliate and defend themselves. The second logic implies that celebrity status acts as a kind of 'social shield' from abuse, where the targets do not retaliate because either the abusive messages don't reach them, or simply don't affect them. Risk is reduced, not because the actions are justified, but because of the *lack of power of the sender* to actually cause any harm. Although the resulting perceptions of risk completely differ in these two modes of thinking, both serve to uphold and reinforce the position of the sender as 'low power/status', and the target as 'high power/status'.

Also notable among participants' discussions was the notion that being a target for online abuse is perceived to be a 'normal' part of the celebrity experience:

"Not bad for a celebrity - expected all the time" [SB13J]

"Celebrities read mean tweets out all the time and I don't think these people get into trouble". BH8J

It is somewhat troubling that, under any circumstances, someone receiving tirades of abusive, threatening or hateful messages "all the time" would be met with a certain

amount of social acceptance of this behaviour, yet this is what these comments suggest. The apparent 'normality' or widespread occurrence of online abuse as an argument for *reducing risk* to a sender is a theme that will be discussed in more depth in Chapters 5 and 6, but it says something interesting about constructs of celebrity power and status (as opposed to other high status jobs or powerful positions) that constant abuse is viewed somewhat as a 'price to be expected to pay'.

In terms of the *sender's* fame and status, there is some suggestion that this might also affect perceptions of risk. Specifically, a high number of followers online are mentioned as a potential factor increasing risk to a sender:

> *"Someone with not many followers would be okay [Y]. If they're got a large number of followers then [O]" [BH13K].*

This suggests a viewpoint that responsibility may increase as one's digital social power and status increases, and somewhat aligns with constructs of the 'ideal' entrepreneurial ideal citizen: maximising opportunities while self-managing risk (Rose, 1996a; Gill, 2010; Howie and Campbell, 2016). Higher numbers of followers, friends or a wider social network is something that has been discussed by researchers as a form of social capital or 'currency' for young people in the digital age:

> "Micro-celebrity practices like interacting directly with followers, appealing to multiple audiences, creating an affable brand and sharing personal information are rewarded, and consequently encouraged, in Twitter culture. The ability to attract and command attention becomes a status symbol". (Marwick and boyd, 2011: 127)

If risk is that which challenges or blurs symbolic boundaries, then the digital environment has arguably blurred the boundaries in terms of 'ordinary citizen' and 'famous celebrity' for young people in today's world, and this may contribute to the idea among adults that the digital world is, in itself, therefore risky (Douglas, 1992; Lupton, 1999a; Marwick, 2015). Risk Society perspectives would also assert the idea that the 'traditional' structures (including those previously defining social status) have slipped away to be replaced with reflexive biographies of the self, which includes 'building onself an identity' on social networking sites (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; 1999). Online fame is not only constructed as a potentially more achievable goal for young people, but potentially a more desirable, profitable and influential one, especially when compared with the traditional roles in politics, business or media and

the barriers that continue to exist in them (Lowbridge, 2015). Celebrity and online status overlap somewhat with the notion of 'visibility' and being 'seen'. The notion of how this aspect affects youth constructs of risk in relation to content posted online will be address in more detail within Chapter 5 (Privacy, Publicity and Visibility).

4.4. Responsibility

The entrepreneurial digital celebrities of the future must also learn to navigate and manage risk online, and so the theme of responsibility is a huge one within young people's discussions of how to categorise each post. Due to the design of each of the example posts, responsibility, for the most part, was divided between the key actors within the scenarios, namely the sender, and the subject. As so many of the posts constituted potential offences (e.g. harassment, threatening communications, hate speech, 'revenge porn' etc.) this overlaps to a huge degree with constructs of victim and offender responsibility. The notion of 'victim-blaming', increasing privatisation of crime control and responsibilisation for citizens 'self-manage'/prevent victimisation have been greatly discussed critiqued in detail elsewhere (Tait, 1995; Garland, 1997; 2000; Lianos and Douglas, 2000; Kelly, 2006; Jewkes, 2011; Muncie, 2014; Barnard-Willis, 2012; Lupton, 2013). This section will explore how these concepts and ideas emerge within young people's discussions of risk and responsibility, with a split between notions of 'subject/victim' responsibilities and 'sender/offender' responsibilities.

a. Subject/victim responsibility

It may come as little surprise that the post that most strongly epitomises the theme of victim/subject responsibility is post G, indicating an instance of revenge porn ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") 'Alice's' perceived responsibility for the risk was discussed frequently by almost all groups of students, and often as a precursor to explanations of how the risk to the *sender* must be therefore be reduced:

> *"Girl could've taken the video herself, so you couldn't go to prison" [BH7G]*
>
> *"[She] might not want people to see it, but it is her fault anyway for sending it" [BH7G]*
>
> *"She might be drunk" [SB8G]*
>
> *"If she sent it to someone then [O]" [BH7G]*

"If Alice put up the video [herself] then [G]. You've made your bed, you've got to lie in it. If another person did, then [O] cause there's no consent" [BH12G]

"She's put it up then [its] confidential, not her [putting it up] then no consent, so [O]" [SB13G]

"Consent? It's a sexual video. If Alice put it up then [G]." [SB13G]

Students discussed the notion of 'permission' in a similar way to that of 'consent', and there was a clear awareness among some that a lack of consent/permission would constitute a criminal offence:

"Could be shared without her permission?" [BH10G]

"Can't you get in trouble for posting something without someone's permission?" [BH9G]

"Can't put someone all over the Internet in a video without their permission". [BH8G]

"If posting something without her consent and she looks bad then that's a crime". [BH13G]

"Sounds sexual. Posting without her consent is a crime" [BH13G]

While responses that highlight a lack of consent or permission seem to position the sender as responsible for the risk, there are potential issues when that notion is considered in the reverse: Alice's perceived 'consent' or 'permission' as potentially *absolving* the sender of responsibility. Responses that frame 'Alice' as having an active role or responsibility for the risk can be divided into three main constructions or prardigms:

a) Subject culpability: 'Alice' is responsible, reducing risk to the sender
b) Subject liability: 'Alice' is partly (ir)responsible, with the sender sharing some responsibility
c) Subject consent/permission: 'Alice' is responsible, reducing risk to the sender

Culpability is linked to 'Alice' having either taken the video herself, and/or uploading or sending the video to someone. Interestingly, *consent* or *permission* is also linked to whether she took, uploaded or sent the video herself. Both position 'Alice' as having

actively participated in the offence and bearing some or all of the responsibility for any risky consequences (notions of liability are more of a grey area, with responsibility potentially shared with the others). What these responses could highlight is an overlap, if not a merging, between students' constructions of *consent* and *culpability.* In the same way that notions of sexual consent conflated with acquiescence and compliance have been critiqued, we must also be wary of the notion of consent as an overly simplified and convenient 'one-stop-shop' box tick (Cowling and Reynolds, 2016).

Although consent has far more empowering and positive connotations than blame, some arguments among participants seem to position the *victim as responsible* for the video risks, rather than the sender/sharer. Within research ethics, the notion of participant consent is critically interrogated to the extent it must include being fully informed of exactly what one is consenting to, the voluntary nature of participation must emphasised, one can exercise a right to withdraw at any point, and one is informed of the potential future prospects of any decisions in the present; all the while being heavily problematised as a concept when it involves children or young people (Barbovschi et al, 2013). This no doubt influences and informs a researcher's critical interpretation of their participants' constructs when discussing the matter (Gill, 2007). Yet participants' constructs of 'Alice's' consent in discussions of this post were represented as more of a one-off incident of 'blanket' permission-giving (through an act of taking or sending the video), effectively denying her any ability to exercise the right to withdraw consent, or acknowledgment that viewing of the content by unwanted audiences would be a violation of consent (McGlynn, 2017). Equally, the issue of voluntary participation was not problematised: participants did not raise the possibility of pressure, exploitation or coercion - another potential reality for victims of sexualised abuse (Finkelhor and Yllo, 1985; Ringrose et al 2012; Powell and Henry, 2014).

In terms of implications, it may be useful for educators and law enforcement to consider that the very term 'consent' may present itself as a 'false-friend' amongst young people, potentially representing a problematic replacement for responsibility and blame, particularly in relation to the taking and sharing of sexual images. The simplified argument of 'she consented to/sent the video' as a factor for reducing risk to the sender, essentially represents several of Sykes and Matza's 'Techniques of Neutralisation' (1957); a victim who is constructed as having given 'permission' or 'consent' provides opportunity for Denial of Injury ('no harm done'), denial of victim

('it's her own fault') and denial of responsibility ('don't blame me') all at once on the part of a sender. The extent to which this is essentially an inherited viewpoint, or rather, the ways that culturally dominant narratives might be internalised and influence perceptions of risk and responsibility, will be discussed therefore in more detail in the following chapters and conclusions of this thesis.

Post G was not the only example to elicit a sense of subject/victim responsibility to reduce the risk to the sender. Participant discussions in response to post H ("Peter: You are GAY…") tended not to focus on the actions and ethics of the imagined sender, but more so on 'Peter':

> *"If you are gay you shouldn't be embarrassed" [SB7H]*
>
> *"If he was gay he could just comment back and say "yes"" [BH12H]*
>
> *"If not [gay] then still [G] because he's say "NO"" [BH12H]*
>
> *"If someone calls you gay, wouldn't you do something about it?" [BH8H]*

Here the focus is not on responsibility for the subject's *past* behaviour (as with post G), but on their *present* and *future* behaviour. Students constructed a sense of what Peter's 'ideal' response ought to be, even to the extent of how he should feel and what he should say. This suggests a certain denial of acknowledgement of Peter as a victim, or the potential harm done to him by having his sexuality discussed publicly (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Just as there is power for a social audience to define and construct how deviant behaviour is judged (Becker, 1973; Lemert, 1952), the social audience in this study also construct and define a victim's behaviour. In this case, the victim's reaction and response can conversely lead to *them* being positioned as 'in the wrong' (morally, socially, culturally), as opposed to the sender.

'Taking offence' is sometimes discussed as if it were a matter of individual choice, thereby supporting conceptualisations of the 'individualisation' of risk. The Risk Society raises the concept of an 'ideal citizen' who, through a series of well-made choices and decisions, can predict, manage and reduce risk in everyday life (Beck, 1992). Some responses demonstrate the perspective that victims of cyber homophobia could, and should, in certain circumstances *choose* not to be embarrassed or offended. The 'responsibilisation' of citizens, even victims of crime, to manage their own risk in the 21st Century is a somewhat recurring theme within the

literature, as well as empirical findings from this study (Garland, 1997; 2000; 2001; Kelly, 2001; Ungar, 2009; Barnard-Wills, 2012).

b. Sender/Perpetrator responsibility

It would be remiss not to highlight that many students also showed concern for the emotional risk to subject/victims within their responses and discussions, and attributed blame and responsibility to the sender/offender too, for both post H ("Peter: You are GAY…") and post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"):

> *"Could be offensive if he's not gay" [BH12H]*
>
> *"Not respecting [Peter's] privacy, and what they like [sexual preferences]" [BH9H]*
>
> *"He'd be unhappy if he got that" [BH7H]*
>
> *"Embarrassing - stuff she doesn't want everyone to see" [SB7G]*
>
> *"It's one thing to post something [online] but spreading it is worse, if she didn't want it [shared]." [SB8G]*
>
> *"[R] or [O] If its private then they don't want anyone to see it" [BH8G]*

This demonstrates that an alternative construction of risk is potentially also developed alongside/in parallel with the techniques of neutralization (i.e. *consideration* of injury, *consideration* of the victim and *consideration* of responsibility on the part of the sender (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Maruna and Copes, 2005). Unusually, these are most striking among responses to post K, which represents a sender being derogatory about a school ("Collingwood College is an absolute dump…"):

> *"[it's] affecting the parents. [SB7K]*
>
> *"Only rude to the school. No bad words. Bit rude. [SB7K]*
>
> *"Making other people out to be bad parents [for sending their kids there]." [BH7K]*
>
> *"Hate speech towards the parents?" [BH9K]*
>
> *"Gives it [the school] a bad name." [BH12K]*

The notion of blaming others (as opposed to accepting responsibility oneself) can itself be considered a 'risky act', conversely. This is somewhat highlighted by one student's response to post L (Ah, ****. Double science…"):

"Not blaming anyone, [it's] their own fault if they're hungover" [SB7L]

Cultural/Symbolic and Risk Society discussions of risk, responsibility and blame in the 21st Century focus a lot on institutions', governments', companies' and other organisations' need to be 'accountable', especially for environmental risks and impact (Douglas 1982; Beck, 1992). Institutions, however, are arguably increasingly more likely to focus on the management of reputation (i.e. the appearance of being responsible), rather than the management of risks per se (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013/2016). In other words, in the 21st Century, the greatest risk *is* reputational. The notion of 'being responsible' and 'taking responsibility', especially for individuals, is criticised as being part of the construct the responsibilised self-governing 'ideal citizen' by Governentality approaches (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996a; Lupton, 1999a; Garland, 2000; Kelly, 2001). It may be that same techniques and discourses (used by institutions) to protect reputation through shifting blame and responsibility are then mimicked by individual citizens.

Conceptualisations of cyberbullies and online 'trolls' tend to position them as 'morally disengaged' individuals, who try to "minimize their role in causing harm by diffusion and displacement of responsibility" onto others (Bandura, 2002: 102). Kyriacou (2015a) expands this slightly further to develop a typology of offenders, based upon potential motivations for cyberbullying:

1. The sociable cyberbully – cyberbullying for fun in order to entertain one's friendship group without any serious consideration for the victim's feelings.
2. The lonely cyberbully – here the cyberbully is relatively isolated, has few friends, spends a great deal of their time on the internet, and eventually gets attracted to abusing individuals, including celebrities and others with whom they have little or no personal contact.
3. The narcissistic cyberbully – here the cyberbully is driven by a mixture of arrogance and self-importance, and motivated by the desire to exercise power by administering harm to another person.
4. The sadistic cyberbully – here the motive is the enjoyment of causing distress, harm and suffering to another person.

5. The morally driven cyberbully – here the cyberbully feels the victim is receiving justice for some transgression they are responsible for, or the victim enjoys circumstances that the cyberbully envies

Although this typology is useful in that it acknowledges a diversity of causes and motivations for aggressive online behaviours, there remain some issues: Firstly, is the somewhat socially positivist approach to online deviance, which fails to recognise the role of the social audience in judging which behaviours are considered pathological, problematic or 'normal', by whom, and in what circumstances (Erikson, 1962; Lemert, 1967; Becker, 1973). Secondly, it represents an act of 'labelling'; a diagnosis and assessment of a *person***,** as opposed to particular behaviours. This reinforces the notion of individuals having fixed attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns, rather than acknowledging the ongoing influence of social interactions to affect change in relation to these things (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2010; Crotty 1998). But most importantly, this overlooks the potential for moving between the different roles: there are so many social, moral, political and cultural subjectivities and contexts involved in how we construct risk and responsibility, not to mention the subtle ways we are expected to be simultaneously displace *and* embrace the two, as contemporary citizens.

The appeal of Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralisation, by contrast (although they are arguably similar), is that the 'Denial of Responsibility' is not positioned as a motivation or explanation for behaviour: they argue that perpetrators to a certain extent acknowledge and recognise that a social, moral, cultural or legal boundary has been crossed (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Rather, the technique traditionally represents a retrospective assessment of behaviour, which firmly positions the offender as a social audience, passing judgement on themselves and their own actions. The reflexive, self-constructing biographical nature of 'techniques of neutralisation' also ensures it sits comfortably with more contemporary theoretical perspectives on risk, such as the Risk Society (Beck, 1992). Kyriacou's (2015a) construction of the 'morally driven cyberbully', for example, might be better explored via the lens of 'Appeal to Higher Loyalties', a technique that will be focused upon in more detail in the next chapter. Responsibility, like risk, is an ever-shifting construct that varies in relation to a number of factors, including important questions such as who is victimizing whom, and how power and relationships influence this.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore how the positioning of sender/offender and subject/victim can influence students' perceptions of risk and responsibility in relation to social media interactions. While legally, the intended or likely impact of a message upon a victim is the main factor in assessing whether an offence has taken place, morally, culturally and socially, there are several other factors at play: such as whether a victim was named, targeted, or addressed directly, their proximity and relationship to the sender, and perceived power, status and responsibility on both the part of the sender/offender and the subject/victim.

Tagging, targeting or naming victims (individual or group) were generally perceived to increase the risk to the sender. In some cases, this concern related to the naming of crime victims, but more frequently to the identification of an alleged perpetrator, with civil concerns such as protection of reputation a higher risk concern than criminal issues such as identification of sexual offence claimants. The risk of what were perceived to be 'direct' abuse or threats, as well as identifying or 'tagging' individuals, was equally likely to be considered a matter for civil litigation, rather than representing a criminal risk involving police. The direct nature of engaging in direct (or 'tagged') interaction was perceived to be riskier perhaps as a symbolic breaching of social boundaries; a virtual 'squaring up' as opposed to 'behind the back' chatter, moving from a discussion amongst 'us' *about* 'them', to one that *includes* 'them' (the subject).

Proximity, both socially and culturally, of an offender and victim was at times perceived to increase the risk (e.g. for homophobic or racist threats), but for the most part was generally seen to reduce the risk (e.g. young friends sharing sexual images or 'reciprocal banter' less risky than adults targeting children). These constructs of risk may be underpinned by conceptions of the 'ideal' offenders and victims and broader myths about crime, particularly sex crimes. The familiarity and close proximity of someone sharing indecent images, for example, was not problematised in the same way as if it were a (dirty) 'old man' posting about an (innocent) 'child', which may explain why peer participation in image based sexual abuse continues to be so widespread and normalised among young people. Ultimately, 'insider' knowledge of a social situation was seen as beneficial to making risk judgements on where the boundaries for acceptable behaviour lie.

Higher power and status of the part of a named target was seen to increase risk (for example, a teacher or a celebrity) but equally, could reduce the risk, if it was

associated with perceived inability of a sender to cause harm. Perceived vulnerability of a victim, combined with power of a perpetrator, was generally thought to increase the criminal risks, supporting Olweus' theory of cyberbullying (2012). However, these power imbalances were not universally recognised, particularly in the case of sexual offences, such as posts G and I, where even child victims were potentially perceived to be more culpable for risk. The pervasive perception of victims as being in some way responsible for their victimisation at times is used as a technique to *specifically reduce* the blame and responsibility (therefore risk) associated with a sender. Victim responsibilisation is generally constructed as a narrative of choice, either relating to past behaviour (e.g. "Alice" choosing taking and sharing indecent video) or present/future actions (e.g. "Peter" choosing to take offence at posts about his sexuality). Particularly in relation to so-called 'revenge porn', victim blaming can be given a positive contemporary spin, with an oversimplified tick-box construction of 'consent' merging/overlapping with age-old negative of 'blame'.

While sender responsibility may be emotionally useful to diffuse or shift onto others, responses also demonstrate that *taking responsibility* may also be an important part of the 'risk management' ideal. This is not only the case for potential perpetrators of cyber abuse, but also for victims: most students viewed civil litigation as the most likely outcome, above police action, even in response to criminal offences (this will be explored further in Chapter 6). Having focused primarily on relationships between senders and subjects in this chapter, the next chapter will therefore draw attention to how risk is perceived and constructed specifically in relation to *individual responsibility.* This will explore how constructs of individual rights and freedoms, including that of freedom of speech can impact risk judgements, as well as the visibility, status or importance of the sender, the utilisation of techniques of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957) and denial more generally, in terms of certain behaviour being normalised and/or widespread online.

CHAPTER FIVE: Justifications and neutralisations

Introduction

This chapter will focus on how participants' construct justifications, neutralisations and defences that were perceived to reduce the risk for some of the example posts. This will draw from Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralisation (1957), theories relating to the individualisation of risk, responsibilisation and governmentality (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Garland, 1997), and risk discourses serving a symbolic/cultural function of 'boundary maintenance', control and regulation (Douglas, 1992; 2002; Lupton, 2013). Techniques of neutralisation provide a useful framework for analysing participants' responses to problematic social media posts for several reasons. Firstly, existing research into cyberbullying and online abuse often reference to psychological theories to account for (mis)behaviour, such as the online 'disinhibition effect', or 'moral disengagement', which can underpin or overlap with techniques such as 'denial of responsibility' or 'denial of injury' (Suler, 2004; Mason, 2008; Görzig & Ólafsson, 2013; Kyriacou and Zuin, 2016). Secondly, perceptions of online spaces as unregulated – the Internet as a so-called 'Wild West' for young people – calls for greater attention on how individuals may be encouraged to 'self-govern' or 'self-manage' risky behaviour (Rose and Miller, 1992; Kelly, 2000; Strom et al, 2011; Arntfeld, 2015;). Exploring neutralisation techniques can also shed light on shifting perceptions of responsibility, harm and deviance in these 'unregulated' environments. Finally, it is argued that in 'neoliberal societies', there is a greater emphasis on personal choice, freedom and responsibility (Lupton, 2013; Trnka and Trundle, 2014). This means that neutralisation techniques can be explored more broadly within the social, political and cultural context in which they are developed, and how young people potentially learn them.

Participants for neutralisation research are often automatically positioned as 'deviant', such as former offenders reflecting on past behaviour (Maruna and Copes, 2005). However, this research attempts to position young people primarily as a 'social audience' of deviance, by using hypothetical examples of online posts as stimuli for discussion (Becker, 1973; Taylor et al, 1973). In this sense, techniques of neutralisation have not been 'elicited' from the participants per se, some of whom straightforwardly condemn certain posts and do not attempt to explore justifications for the sender. Rather, neutralisation techniques have emerged thematically from the analysis of participant responses to why they thought certain types of content were

less risky than others. This chapter particularly examines those cases where participants argued for a 'downgrading' or reduction of risk, and on what basis they argued so. Techniques of neutralisation are often considered in a negative light, simply by virtue of the fact that they 'excuse' problematic conduct, yet it is important to emphasise that they also may function as part of a 'normal' and 'healthy' psychology (Maruna and Copes, 2005). As previously suggested, it may be that these processes are a vital part of our assessment of (hierarchies of) morality, emotion and risk; a way of making judgements and prioritising that are neither inherently 'good' nor 'bad' (Lupton, 2013). The position when examining these processes aims to be one of critical respect (Gill, 2007), where perspective, ideologies and discourses may be critiqued, without intending to pass negative judgement on those who express or reproduce them.

5.1. Actions vs. Words: Denial of injury/dichotomising harms

Many students recognised that the publication of material on social media could cause harm, but mostly this was because evaluations of harm tended to correlate with participants' constructs of potential consequences (Chapter 6) or their moral, emotional or legal judgements of the conduct (Chapter 3). In cases where potential harm was imagined, there appeared to be a distinction made between violence that was physical (offline), and violence occurring in an online environment:

> *"[Y] Because it's not physical assault, but it is a kind of assault [verbal/with words]" [BH7H]*

As Salter highlights, online abuse is often justified via a "radical interpretation of the right to free speech", where 'free' speech is conceptualised as a right to say whatever one wants (2017:33). In legal and human rights terms, one of the key principles of freedom of expression is that it comes with certain limitations and restrictions, and quite a few at that:

> 'The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of

information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary' (Section 2, Article 10: ECHR).

The predominant perceived limit when it comes to the right to free speech is related to the potential to cause harm to others, encapsulated in the adage of someone shouting "Fire!" in a packed theatre, the logic being that this could create a stampede where people could be injured or even killed, and the speaker would be responsible for causing this harm (Warburton, 2009). One of the issues with this analogy is that what constitutes 'harm' or 'risk' to people is far more complex than simply literal danger or physical injury (Douglas, 2002; Lupton, 1999a). Words and speech have long been used as a tool for symbolic oppression and violence, particularly when including racist, misogynistic or homophobic language, and this includes peer-to-peer and online conduct (Cowie and Myers, 2018; Salter, 2017). Feminist academics have stressed that words form part of a 'continuum of violence' against women, whereby sexist and misogynistic language is utilised to keep them 'in their place' and out of the public sphere (Cockburn, 2004; Coleman, 2014; Jane, 2014; Salter, 2017). As outlined previously (Chapter 3) legislation exists in England prohibiting the publication of material designed to incite violence/hatred, as well as up-sentencing for hate motivated offences, but discrepancies remain among police forces in terms of which identities are afforded these protections (Chapter 3). Williams (2009) highlights how laws restricting speech have developed within specific socio-cultural contexts - such as the inclusion of religious hatred after the 11th September attacks in 2001 - and this is similar for recent inclusions of women and sub-cultures in parts of the UK. However, policing online speech becomes problematic when we consider that the Internet transcends state boundaries, which may have differing hate speech legislation (see Holocaust denial as an example: Fraser, 2009).

Previous researchers highlight how some young people report being upset by viewing hateful content online, while others note how *few* of their young participants actually condemned online hate speech (Hasebrink et al, 2009; Davis, 2012). Findings from this research show that this difference may be partly due to diversity in how 'risk' and 'harm' is constructed among young people in relation to material published online. There appears to be a prevailing perception that online speech cannot cause serious harm, or constitute a criminal risk, unless connected with *physical* acts of violence. Many participants were keen to distinguish between speech they felt indicated violent acts, and contrast it with what was considered 'pure expression'. Criminal and legal risks were thought to be much higher for examples where students felt that a

statement indicated a previous criminal offence, as shown by responses to Post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk…"):

"They could've just raped someone" [SB7C]

"If it actually happened they could get sued" [BH7C]

"If it happened then [RED]" [BH7C]

"Could be arrested on suspicion of rape? Admitted it?" [BH9C]

"Should be put in prison as they could've done it [raped someone]" [SB13C]

"Don't know if they did it but they're agreeing with it" [SB7C]

There is confusion here between students' assessment of the risk of the post itself (i.e. an expression) and the content as indicative of *previous criminal acts*. Responses suggest that it wasn't so much the publication of the words that would be the rationale for arrest, but the implication that the sender had raped someone (i.e. committed a criminal act 'offline' or 'in real life'). There was a very similar response to example F ("Waiting at the gates…"):

"This time" so it's not the first time [they've done this]." [BH7F]

"Might not do it, but have done it before ['this time']" [SB8F]

"Could be used as evidence. Could be used against them in court. Suggesting they've done it before [I ask what to clarify] - had sex with a child". [BH13F]

"Threat of violence. "This time" suggests they've done it before" [BH13F]

In both cases, it is the confessional nature of the publication - the revelation of the sender as an attacker - that participants felt raised the risk of the content, rather than the content itself. Responses to posts C and F also notably indicate how speech could imply *future* criminal or violent acts, too:

"[R] 'Cause they're actually there and waiting" [BH7F]

"Didn't say you're going to hit them but could be physical assault or rape?" [BH10F]

"Cause they're already there and planning to do it - beat him up". [BH10F]

"If he did do it [as in attack them] they could be arrested" [BH13F]

"He's basically saying he will rape someone" [BH10C]

This was by no means a unanimous response; many of the students felt that the content alone, as an expression of an idea or opinion, was risky regardless of past or future behaviour on the part of the sender. This then tended to correlate with a reduced perception of risk among participants:

"It's really bad but they've not done anything" [BH9C]

"Not saying he will rape someone" [BH12C]

"Just saying it. Talking about it happening, not committing a crime" [BH10C]

"Pretty bad, but they've not actually done anything" [BH10F]

"Nothing's actually happened. Don't know, if they went through with it" [BH13F]

"It's [R] but depends if you'd done something wrong" [SB13F]

Overall, those who connected the post to past or future acts of violence rated the posts as riskier than those who felt it was simply an expression. This pattern also occurred among responses to threatening and abusive content directed towards protected identity groups. For example, post A ("Gurkhas are filth…") and post E ("I'm sick to death of *****ing dykes…"):

"'Should be killed' is not a threat, they're just saying it" [BH9A]

"You could say a whole race of people could go but you're not physically doing anything" [BH12A]

"Even though it's disgusting, as long as there's no physical violence, it's okay." [BH13A]

"They're not actually doing it. Not actually hurting anyone, not a criminal offence" [BH7E]

"Could be assault. If violence, then red" [SB8E]

"Just saying you're going to hit someone" [BH8E]

"Serious if it was carried out" [BH13E]

"Okay to say, not to do" [BH13E]

The responses indicate a very clear risk judgement process that centres on the distinction of 'saying' and 'doing', to the point of emphasising a dichotomy. This was further reinforced through analysis of discussion of post D ("Massive delays @HeathrowAirport…"):

"Loads of people say [things like] that. It doesn't mean they're going to do it" [BH7D]

"Not actually done anything yet" [SB7D]

"They wouldn't actually do it" [SB7D]

"Just saying" is repeatedly positioned in opposition to "actually doing". Constructs of risk are therefore interlinked with constructs of harm, with 'harm' conceptualised as being in the *physical* realm, as opposed to verbal or virtual. It can be argued this neutralisation of the sender's actions is indicative of 'Denial of Injury', where the "wrongfulness of one's behaviour is determined by the amount of harm done" (Maruna and Copes, 2005: 232; Sykes and Matza, 1957). This suggests a paradigm is less harm (or no harm) occurs when an attack is situated online (in the form of words), as opposed to offline (in the form of physical acts). This could also reflect broader cultural discourses that construct the Internet and the online world as being somehow separate to the 'real' world and therefore 'real' injury. Wall (2001) argues that discussions of crimes in so-called 'cyberspace' are unhelpful, as they reinforce the perception of an alternative or virtual reality. This focuses attention towards the reduction or denial of injury to an online victim, rather than the harmful or malicious intent of an offender. Similarly, here, participants' assessment of risk did not focus on the intentions, motives or morality of the sender as much as the (denial of) injury to a target/victim. If, as this finding suggests, denial of injury is utilised as a technique of neutralisation, not only by online offenders but also by online *bystanders or witnesses* (the audience), this has implications for victims of online abuse. Technology companies often rely on users reporting offensive, abusive or inappropriate content to them, rather than them actively monitoring and moderating (another form of 'self-governance' or 'self-regulation') (Salter, 2017). If there remains a pervasive perception that 'no real harm' is caused by online threats or abuse, then waiting for users to report problems becomes an ineffective solution. This problem may also be

exacerbated by ‘diffusion of responsibility’ and/or ‘bystander effect’, potentially leaving victims even more isolated (Myers and Cowie, 2017; Latane and Darley, 1970).

Post A (“Gurkhas are filth …”) is potentially a prosecutable incitement of violence on the grounds of race, and therefore would be criminally ‘risky’ to post online. However, one reason why it was not perceived to be so was because it was not viewed as an *instruction* to commit violence: *“Doesn't say 'shoot them', that would be higher” [BH12A]*). This is revealing in terms of perceptions of online speech as an *act*; words that are perceived as less ‘active’ or ‘directive’ being considered less risky. This may constitute a ‘Denial of Responsibility’ (Sykes and Matza, 1957): publishing the statement ‘they should be shot’ apparently representing *less* responsibility for acts of violence, than ‘shoot them’. This argument for downgrading risk also may represent a ‘Justification by Comparison’, where people claim, “they could be worse or are not as bad as some others” (Cromwell and Thurman, 2003:546).

The overall techniques of denial rest on the concept that words are not action, a denial of publishing or speech as *being an act* (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976). Speech may be constructed as expressive (indicating sender feelings) or as directive/commissive (relating to action), but participant perspectives are so varied on this that what emerges is a lack of consensus on risk. A major concern about unrestricted speech is the potential for hate to spread on a far wider-reaching scale than simply individuals (for example, media outlets, blogs, governments or other influential groups). The foundations of freedom of expression within universal human rights were partly born out of an intention to restrict political propaganda dehumanising and demonizing entire groups (although this, too, is problematic; see: Baker, 2009; Rowbottom, 2017). Within this study, participants did not pursue the argument that individuals carry the same levels of risk/responsibility for publishing speech online, instead indicating that factors such as audience, status and reach *were* key aspects of risk assessment.

5.2. Privacy, publicity and visibility

When discussing online speech, participants questioned whether risk and responsibility should be considered equal, or whether certain actors carry more power, and therefore responsibility, than others (Chapter 4). Salter (2017:188), for example, problematizes the idea that girls and boys should face the same consequences for ‘underage sexting’ offences, an argument put forward by his young participants in the name of “equality”. Participants in this study demonstrated a variety

of perspectives on privacy, visibility, risk and responsibility, and were frequently in disagreement as to of what kind of content was acceptable to publish online. For example:

> *"If you are gay, you shouldn't be embarrassed."* [SB7H]

Several comments in response to post H ("Peter, you are GAY….") indicate the perception that Peter's sexuality is nothing to be ashamed of, and that if the post is simply speaking the truth or stating a fact, it shouldn't be considered risky. This may ironically be partly due to students' own *inclusive* attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, essentially along the lines of 'I don't have an issue with it, so why would Peter (or anyone)?', so therefore there is no risk. This indicates highly individualistic approach towards conceptualising risk, responsibility and harm, positioning one's own perspective as central to risk assessment, rather than acknowledging structural inequalities, like homophobia (Rivers, 2018). Furthermore, Peter is *denied the status of victim*, instead being reponsibilised to react in what is perceived to be the (politically) 'correct' manner (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Once again, the imagined perspectives, intention and position of the individual sender are prioritised, in this case over the rights of the subject to privacy:

> "Everyone has the right to respect for his or her private and family life… The concept of a right to a private life encompasses the importance of personal dignity and autonomy and the interaction a person has with others, both in private or in public. Respect for one's private life includes: respect for individual sexuality" (Article 8 HRA 1998; Liberty, 2017)

Several students highlighted an awareness of the concept of privacy and articulated a sense that this was an important factor when assessing the risk of publishing a statement publicly online, in relation to post H ("Peter: You are GAY…"). The 'making public' of something private was seen to increase social and civil risks:

> *"Its public, that means everyone can see it" [SB7H]*

> *"Peter could sue the guy saying it. It's about his sexuality" [BH7H]*

> *"Insulting, not respecting [Peter's] privacy and what they like [sexuality]" [BH9H]*

Sex, as a sub-theme of privacy, was often linked to students' constructs and discussion of risk. Post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") also prompted

discussion of what should or shouldn't be made public, either for moral or legal reasons:

> *"Embarrassing - stuff she doesn't want everyone to see. Lots of people could see it if it's on YouTube" [SB7G]*

> *"Can't put someone all over the Internet in a video without their permission. [R] or [O] If its private then they don't want anyone to see it." [BH8G]*

> *"Everyone's going to watch it and its private." [BH9G]*

This shows some support for Marwick and boyd's (2014) argument that, far from being reckless risky publishers, some young social media users are highly aware 'risk managers' in relation to privacy. Privacy risks, like other risks, are perceived to be highly context specific, overlapping with constructs of friendship, intimacy and trust (Pilkington, 2007; Mishna et al, 2009; Ofcom, 2014). As highlighted by the Cultural/Symbolic approach, risk can be conceptualised as a loss of *control and context*: a symbolic 'leakage' through social boundaries, rather than literal danger or physical harm (Douglas, 1986; 1992; 2002). The implicit suggestion is that digital content shared via social media isn't necessarily intended for 'the public', i.e. everyone, to see. Shariff (2015:127) explores how Calo's concept of 'privacy harm' was raised by young people in response to sexting and embarrassing pictures being published on Facebook, defining this as the "unwanted perception of observation", or "unanticipated or coerced use of information concerning a person against that person". This conceptualisation shifts the debate away from privacy rights per se (over certain information), and focuses attention on how that information is used or distributed to detrimental effect against the subject. The issue is not so much whether Peter is gay, or that Alice has participated in a sexual video, but rather whether there is potential for harm in the *dissemination* of that information (therein lies the risk for the sender).

Where harmful breaches of privacy were discussed, students tended to rate the post as being riskier. However, this argument was at times based upon the potential visibility of the content and the audience reach, rather than a judgement upon the act of publication itself:

> *"Cause loads of people could see it" [SB7B]*

> *"[Y] - If the teacher or parents saw it" [BH12L]*

A common justification used to argue a reduction in risk, therefore, was the claim that 'no one would really see it' (i.e. *lack* of visibility or audience reach). Often this did not really mean 'the public', but rather the subject or target themselves:

> *"Alice might not see it or even care?" [BH8G]*
>
> *"Zayn won't see it" [SB8B]*
>
> *"Maybe the teacher would notice, but no one else would" [BH12I]*
>
> *"If she [Beyoncé] saw it she might sue, but chances of her seeing it are slim" [BH12J]*
>
> *"Beyoncé won't care, she's a celebrity… She won't see it." [BH13J]*
>
> *"They [the school] might not even see it [G]." [BH8K]*
>
> *"School wouldn't pick up on it" [BH13L]*

This is interesting for several reasons: Firstly, it implies that the risk of harmful publication is potentially reduced if the subject isn't *aware* of their victimisation, and secondly that the online environment may a place where risky content can *avoid* 'being seen', as much as be 'made visible', both of which will now be explored further:

The claim that the risk of publishing harmful material about a person is reduced if the subject is unlikely to see it is certainly an individualistic one, as it focuses solely on repercussions for the sender, rather than the victim or the audience. It is possible that this perspective has been elicited from the participants through the research design, however, as they are primarily being asked consider risk *to the sender* of publishing material (Chapter 2). The risk is also framed in terms of the potential reaction of an individual targeted victim, and *not* so much the police, the wider audience generally or the moderators of the platform. The argument is not 'Facebook might take it down' or 'it might be offensive to people watching/reading', instead it is '*the victim* will not see it, or care'. This indicates the neutralisation technique of denial of injury ('what you don't know can't hurt you'), but perhaps also a degree of denial of responsibility: in this scenario, it is the victim who is implicitly responsibilised for taking action against an online perpetrator, rather than an authority or bystander (Sykes and Matza, 1957). This mimics wider social shifts towards individuals being responsibilised to 'self-manage' their own victimization, including those who are victims of crime (Garland, 1997; 2000, Hinds and Grabosky, 2008 – see also: Topping, 2013). In addition, many

online safety campaigns are targeted towards young potential victims to firstly protect themselves (to prevent crime) and secondly, report offenders to social media sites or the authorities (to secure justice) (Barnard-Wills, 2012; Karaian, 2013; 2015; Salter, 2017). The continued emphasis of responsibility of the victim undoubtedly contributes to a perception that a victim who is unaware of their victimisation cannot claim victim status.

There are also indications of a perceived dual nature of social media in terms of visibility: On the one hand, online publication increases risk ('loads of people could see it'), yet also potentially decreases risk ('probably won't see it'). However, what is evident from closer analysis of the responses is that this may relate to the status of the sender, rather than digital platforms more generally:

> *"Someone with not many followers would be okay [Y]. If they've got a large number of followers, then [O]" [BH13K]*
>
> *"If Alan Davies said it[15] and loads of people could see it then [O]" [BH12J]*
>
> *"One person saying it is okay, if loads of people were saying it, it'd be worse" [BH12H]*

The increase in risk relates to *who* is posting, potentially indicating a perceived 'hierarchy of responsibility' among social media users based on audience following. This may be linked with celebrity culture, as online platforms make a certain level of fame or celebrity appear accessible to all (although not equally) (Marwick, 2015). Salter (2017: 62) claims the very design of social media, in particular the "quantification of popularity and attention" actively contributes to the rise of the 'micro-celebrity' and what he terms 'abusive idols' online (see also: Senft, 2008). 'Large numbers' or 'loads of people' witnessing or participating in the offence is thought to increase the risk, rather than decrease it (although the opposite argument is also made that online abuse is 'widespread' or 'normalises', which will be explored later in this thesis). There appears to be some recognition of the potential cumulative harm to victims, and an awareness of context, rather than considering publications in isolation. More likely, students are keen to distinguish between which individual users are *more* or *less* culpable for the same kinds of behaviour. The 'ordinary' users, with a low number of followings, saying something in isolation, is easier to neutralise and justify than a 'celebrity' user, with a large following, or part of a campaign of abuse

[15] Reference to the Lord McAlpine Twitter libel case (see: Sweney, 2013)

involving others. A lack of prominence, publicity or following on the part of the sender may essentially form part of both a 'denial of responsibility' or 'denial of injury' (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

While the potential risks of disclosure were highlighted and discussed in relation to certain posts, what was missing from participants' responses was the consideration of harm of *non-disclosure*, notably in relation to post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"):

> *"It's about someone, personal information, but said to everyone" [BH12I]*

As discussed in Chapter 4, while students were quick to point out the harms of making information about an alleged teacher-student relationship public, at no point did any participants highlight that the claims ought to be brought to the attention of someone in authority more privately. There have long been debates about whether media laws and regulation, particularly in relation to defamation and privacy, may be misused by those in power to keep damaging allegations out of the public gaze. Essentially, the concept of what is 'personal' or 'private' can be used as justification for non-disclosure, allowing abuses to continue as a kind of 'open secret' (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013). The student who identified a civil risk in relation to this post was concerned primarily about breach of privacy, not the harm of the allegation itself. This is a kind of reversal of the line of thinking previously explored, where students were concerned that a post indicated *past or future criminal actions,* or (in a confessional way) were bringing serious offline offences into public view. While students were quick to claim, "he could have actually done it" in relation to posts C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk…") and F ("Waiting at the gate for my little friend…"), this point was *not* raised in relation to allegations about Mr. Sanders. This perhaps reveals more about (mis)conceptions of what constitutes a serious offence re: teacher-student relations, rather than being relevant to communications offences.

Finally, participant responses indicate a slight merging of the concept of 'seeing' (visibility of content) and 'caring' (impact upon audience or target):

> *"Alice might not see it or even care?" [BH8G]*

> *"Beyoncé won't care, she's a celebrity… She won't see it." [BH13J]*

> *"If I tweeted "[names his school] is a dump", then no one would care" [BH13K]*

> *"If you are gay, you shouldn't be embarrassed."* [SB7H]

There is an assumption being made on behalf of the subject/victim, and this is then factored into considerations of risk for a sender. This shows that the social reaction to crime goes beyond simply whether conduct is, in isolation, judged to be deviant, but also whether the victim is perceived to have been impacted or not. The process of labelling and judging perhaps involves assessments of the victim and their 'actions'/response, as much as it does the offender in some cases. The problematic aspect of this is that assumptions cannot always be clearly made about victim impact/harm. The same behaviours may have very different consequences for victims in different scenarios. Participants' considerations of this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 ('Imagining consequences'). For now, the focus remains upon constructions of justifications, defences of neutralisations of behaviour from an individualistic perspective, and this includes constructs of individual rights, such as 'Freedom of speech'.

5.3. Freedom of speech

a. Humour, jokes and banter

Existing cyberbullying and sexting research have investigated the notion of humour, jokes or banter, when exploring youth perceptions of where the boundaries of acceptability lie (Davis, 2012; Ringrose et al, 2012; Bauman, 2013; Talwar et al., 2014; Shariff, 2015; Betts and Spenser, 2016;). Banter and humour are often used to justify certain types of offensive speech such as racism, homophobia and sexism, despite the fact many children admit to being upset by this (Livingstone et al 2014; Myers and Cowie, 2016; 2017; Cowie and Myers, 2018). Even in the case of online threats, the justification of humour or banter may be a legitimate one, as shown in the case of Paul Chambers (Bowcott, 2012), who was cleared of sending a menacing communication on appeal, on the grounds that the tweet was clearly a joke. Prosecuting guidelines state:

> "Prosecutors should only proceed… [if there is] evidence that the communication in question *is more than:* Offensive, shocking or disturbing; or Satirical, iconoclastic or rude comment; or The expression of unpopular or unfashionable opinion about serious or trivial matters, *or banter or humour, even if distasteful to some or painful to those subjected to it*."
> (Parliament.co.uk, 2014 – my emphasis).

The main problem with the defence of humour is that what is considered 'funny' is entirely subjective and context-specific. Research with online bullies or 'trolls' claim that deviant acts deliberately intended to cause distress may be described as 'fun', supporting theories of risky behaviour and social rule-breaking as pleasurable (Lyng, 1990; Cassidy et al, 2009; Bartlett, 2014; Kyriacou, 2015a). "Taking risks is sometimes seen as relinquishing the control of one's behaviour imposed by society, stepping outside and resisting expectations" (Lupton, 1999a:155) In addition, subversive and politically incorrect jokes, mockery, banter and pranks are thought to play an active role in strengthening social bonds, particularly between young men (Law et al., 2012; Salter, 2017). Some teenagers claim "boys' sense of humour is better than girls", and this can be used to justify aspects of homosocial 'lad culture' that deliberately target women and girls (Ringrose and Harvey, 2015:214). This study has also identified humour as a common strategy for defence of speech that might otherwise be considered 'risky'. This was the case for a whole range of messages, including:

Post B, potentially indicating intentions for suicide or self-harm ("I'M SO UPSET…"):

"Could be a joke" [BH7B]

"It's maybe not serious"[BH8B]

"Joking." [SB13B]

Post C, justifying rape/victim blaming ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk…"):

"Just joking" [BH7C]

"Just sending a message, if just joking with friends" [BH7C]

Post F, potentially constituting harassment or a threat of violence ("Waiting at the gates for my little friend…"):

"You don't know if they're joking or not, but you could sue anyway" [BH7F]

"Green 'cause it could be a joke." [SB8F]

"Might mean something else, not literal, just like an inside joke or a code" [BH12F]

Post G, potentially indecent images of a child/ image-based sexual abuse ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"):

"If they thought the video was funny?" [BH7G]

"Only social media so it could be a funny video" [SB8G]

"If it's between to friends, like a joke, then yellow" [BH13G]

'Just a joke' potentially signifies a range of techniques of neutralisation: Denial of Injury ('you can't be upset by a joke'), Denial of Responsibility ('it was intended to be funny, not my fault if taken otherwise'), Denial of Victim ('not aimed *at* anyone' or 'between friends') and even Appeal to Higher Loyalties: as with the case of Paul Chambers, content may be defended on the grounds of freedom of expression or 'the right to make a joke' (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

Perhaps ironically, the post where the defence of 'just joking' was most challenged by participants was post D ("Massive delays @HeathrowAirport…"), the example intended to imitate Paul Chambers' in the so-called 'Twitter Joke Trial' (Bowcott, 2012). There was a lack of consensus among the students as to whether humour could constitute a legitimate defence and therefore a reduction in risk:

"Could be a joke, just messing around" [BH7D]

"They could be joking" [BH7D]

"Might be a joke, not serious" [BH8D]

"Saying you'll blow up a plane!... No other thing to say he's just joking" [BH10D]

"Might be saying it so its sounds good as a joke when people read it" [BH12D]

"It could be funny, like, if they're off on a lads' holiday" [BH12D]

"Even a joke would have to be taken seriously, as if it's an actual threat" [SB13D]

"Even though it's posted to be funny, it could be perceived as threatening" [BH13D]

This appears the only post that prompted students to argue that *even if it was a joke*, it should still be given the highest (criminal) risk rating. Examples of threats of violence, hate speech, and other potentially criminal communications were generally not deemed to be as risky as post D. This implies that certain subjects, i.e. terrorism, are too serious to be joked about (Chapter 3). It also suggests that some young participants perceive there to be limitations to humorous freedom of speech. The implication of there being "*no other thing to say he's just joking"* is that the sender ought to have in some way 'signified' the message as a joke (perhaps with inclusion of a Lol or #justkidding) as a way of potentially reducing risk. There is a shift in positioning of risk perception here from the intentions of the sender, to considering the audience and the potential differing interpretation of the content, something that did not happen as often with other example posts.

b. Truth and Falsehood

One of the main purposes of freedom of expression is to ensure the functioning of democracy, by enshrining the right of citizens and organisations to share ideas and information. This right is strongly associated with the right to speak *truth*, especially to power in the case of the press and media (Article 10, EHCR: Freedom of Expression). It is not intended as a defence for spreading false information, propaganda or lies, in fact (in the case of state media) it is to some extent intended to safeguard against this. This idea has become increasingly complex with the recent increased fear over 'fake news', which has been explicitly linked to both the rise of social media and political power play (Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). It is therefore unsurprising that the issue of whether a statement published online was 'true' or 'false' played a huge part in students' discussions and perceptions of risk in publication. This was most notable in the case of post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"). The level of risk was perceived to differ, depending on whether the allegations were true or not, with participants generally perceiving 'lies' to be riskier:

> *"If it's true then [Y] if false then [O]" [SB7I]*
>
> *"Might not be true, might be wrong. Might be [O]" [BH7I]*
>
> *"It's a lie so you could be sued for that" [BH9I]*
>
> *"Teacher could lose his job if it's not true, and could also sue if it's false" [BH9I]*

"If it's not true then it's naming and shaming the girl and the teacher, his reputation would be ruined" [BH9I]

"Mr Sanders could sue if it's not true" [BH10I]

"Could be false, it probably is, that's a lie, then [O]?" [BH12I]

"If it's not true, made up, also bullying Jenny" [BH12I]

"If true then [G]" [BH7I]

This is not all that surprising: It follows that participants might recognise the seriousness of the allegations and engage with the dominant moral principle that 'lying is wrong', and thus recognise the posting of this as risky, if false. Some participants seemed aware of the legal concept of defamation/libel (Chapter 3). Participants seemed less concerned about the identification of a child sex victim if true (see Chapter 4). Notably, some participants expressed the view that the level of risk would be the same *regardless* of whether the claims were true or false:

"Just a statement" [SB13I]

"Nothing criminal, nothing illegal, if true or false" [SB13I]

"[Y] Whether true or false" [BH12I]

As also highlighted in previous chapters, some students felt publishing the claims would be risky to post even if true, suggesting that *non-disclosure* would be a less risky, preferable alternative to disclosure:

"If it was true the person would get the teacher arrested" [SB8I]

"If it's true then it's not your business to post that" [BH9I]

"If true then [R] because you've given out the names of people doing a crime" [BH9I]

"If true then [R] because it's an older person and a younger person, a teacher and an underage child" [BH10I]

"If true then it's illegal" [SB7I]

Here, we return to the previous theme of privacy, including that of 'privacy harms' created through the dissemination of information relating to a person, being used against that person (Shariff, 2015: 127). But the 'harm' here is not explicitly highlighted in terms of Jenny's right to anonymity (as a child sex victim), but rather the potential consequences for the teacher and Jenny as 'guilty parties' in a criminal act. The risk is constructed, once again, in connection with physical, criminal actions 'in real life', and not in terms of limitations on free speech (e.g. to protect the rights of a sexual offences claimant). In the case of Post I there seems to be a direct moral conflict at play in terms of risk and public speech: it is both *necessary to speak the truth* (to disclosure the potential abuse of a child), and *necessary to restrict speech* (to protect Jenny's right to anonymity, if true, and Mr Sanders' reputation, if false). This creates a false dichotomy, in which students tended to argue that the allegations either 'should' or 'shouldn't' be disclosed if true, with a noticeable absence of discussion of the appropriate *manner* or *method* of disclosure (e.g. 'this should be disclosed, but not in this way'). The act of speaking the truth, because it carries risk, and that risk is individualised, means some students (when 'forced to choose' how to manage that risk) would opt for straightforward non-disclosure (Beck, 1992). This has huge potential implications for child safeguarding, as discussed in more detail within the Conclusions chapter.

Post I was a rare example where 'speaking the truth' was constructed as problematic or risky. Generally, 'truth' was used as a *justification* for publication, and potentially therefore reducing the risk. This was even in cases where this could constitute a breach of privacy, such as example H ("Peter: You are GAY…"):

> *"[O] or [Y] if it's true 'cause it's just speaking the truth, if it's not true then [R] [BH7H]*
>
> *"Could be true. If not true, could be joking so [Y]" [SB7H]*
>
> *"[G] or [Y] because it's not saying that its bad [to be gay], they're just saying "you're gay" [BH8H]*
>
> *"Just stating a fact." [BH12H]*
>
> *"Might not be saying it's bad, just saying it" [SB7H]*
>
> *"If not gay, then it's bad" [SB7H]*

"If it's not true then you're spreading rumours that harm his reputation" [BH9H]

"If they're not gay, that's also quite offensive" [BH9H]

"Could be offensive if he's not gay" [BH12H]

"Could be a joke? Obviously, it could still be offensive" [BH13H]

"If Peter is not gay, then right to sue" [SB13H]

Although attitudes to sexuality are changing, it remains possible in England to sue for allegations relating to sexuality. In 2005, Robbie Williams received a £200,000 payout from The People after it was claimed he'd had a sexual encounter with a man. The libel claim was not based on the grounds that being gay would damage his reputation, but rather on the grounds that the newspaper was implying, by default, that he was a hypocrite and lying about his sexuality, and *this* was the false information damaging to his reputation – similar to Jason Donovan vs. The Face in 1992 (Graff, 2005). However, this remains a contentious issue for LGBTQ+ rights campaigners, as this can be seen to reinforce heterosexual hegemony and stigma around 'non-normative' sexualities. Risk is, again, constructed in this example in relation to spreading 'damaging lies' about Peter, by stating that he is gay when he is not, echoing the principles of defamation law.

By contrast, 'just speaking the truth' or 'stating a fact' is therefore considered a justification for publication. This could be considered as a technique of 'Appealing to Higher Loyalties', particularly if freedom of expression/right to speak the truth is constructed as part of human rights (Sykes and Matza, 1957; ECHR, Article 10). Furthermore, this justification of 'truth' extended beyond the context of an individual's sexuality and was at times also used to justify more problematic examples of hate speech, in response to example A ("Gurkhas are filth…"):

"It's lying saying they don't wash and they abuse their kids…. [response]: Might be orange if you know that they're bad or if you'd been abused by them" [BH7A]

Truth is a legitimate defence to libel, however as previously mentioned attempts to use a defamation defence to justify inciting racial hatred suggests that litigation, rather than police action, is perhaps perceived to be the most likely 'risky' outcome. This may indicate a shift in society from 'collective' experiences of risk and protective state

intervention, towards personal accountability - even for crime victims - and individual responsibility for seeking justice (Powell and Edwards, 2003). The risk here is litigation, and the defence is 'truth' i.e. a sender's personal experience or 'tacit knowledge' (examined in Chapter 4). The participant's implication that being 'abused by them' would justify the post demonstrates a perception of moral reliability on the perspectives and experiences of the individual. This provides further support for the idea of individualisation; if we are forced to experience and manage risk as individuals, it follows that our risk perceptions of 'the world' may be primarily constructed from an individualistic perspective (Giddens, 1991).

Conversely, this individualisation is not applied to those who it targets: 'Gurkhas' are labelled *collectively* as morally deficient, rather than focusing on the immorality of an individual's actions. This framing is also common within the mainstream press, particularly in relation to crime stories: The highlighting of identity characteristics of offenders, such as race, nationality or class, can implicitly suggest culpability or deficiency among a group of people, and constructs of an 'ideal offender' (Jewkes, 2011). This is particularly the case with marginalised groups, such as people who are homeless, drug users, unemployed, etc. Risk and deviance labelling is expanded beyond individuals to include a whole group of people being constructed as criminal/risky, and therefore 'justifiably' requiring additional social controls (Lupton, 1999a). This is relevant to both Cultural/Symbolic approaches to risk (Douglas, 1986;1992;2002) and theories of Risk Society/Governmentality: The symbolic process of 'othering' is reconceptualised as a 'rational' risk-management approach, with crime news stories or personal anecdotes presented as 'evidence' to justify and neutralise the demonization of a whole group of people.

c. Opinion

Another dominant theme emerging from discussions was the justification of offensive posts on the grounds of expressing an opinion. This was a common defence and even used to downgrade the risk of online abuse relating to race or sexuality, such as post A ("Gurkhas are filth…"), E ("I'm sick to death of ****ing dykes…") and J ("Beyoncé is nothing…"):

> *"Free speech. It's an opinion" [BH13A]*

> *"Just a bit rude – expressing an opinion" [SB8E]*

"You can't say your opinion [like this] and get away with it, because we don't have freedom of speech here [i.e. in the UK]" [BH9E]

"Just some guy's opinion" [SB13J]

The concept of free speech is commonly misunderstood as a 'catch-all' right to say whatever one wishes to, rather than a right that must be balanced with other freedoms, such as right to a private and family life, freedom from discrimination etc. The right to free speech being constructed as a defence to hate speech is not unusual, particularly within an online environment (Salter, 2017). This provides further evidence for potential dichotomous thinking; as with the earlier example of 'physical violence/actions' vs. 'just saying/words', freedom of speech is conceptualised as 'freedom to say anything' vs. 'no freedom at all'. In this sense, the justification of opinion may represent 'Appeal to Higher Loyalties', if constructed as the individual sender's right to freedom of expression (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Opinion or freedom of speech as a neutralisation technique emerged in response to a variety of different posts, but most commonly in response to negative comments about school: Post K ("Collingwood College is an absolute dump…") and L ("… monster hangover #Lifesucks"):

"It's just what he thinks… It's personal opinion, can't get you into trouble." [SB8K]

"Personal opinion" [SB8K]

"Only an opinion" [BH10K]

"It might offend some people, but it's still okay. Saying "Man city is a bad football team" will offend someone" [BH10K]

"Bad. Negative. But opinion" [BH12K]

"[G] saying what he thinks" [BH10L]

"[G] Just opinion. Whatever they want to say, it doesn't offend anyone else" [BH12L]

This is interesting given the context and environment in which these comments were made. The research was undertaken in a school setting, with a set-up similar to the traditional classroom: all students participating were in school uniform, the researcher

took on the role of teacher, the usual 'rules' of the classroom applied (see Chapter 2). Staff members were present for each workshop. Research with participants in institutional settings can reveal perceptions of the institution itself, as much as the content of discussions (Goffman, 1961). Research on bullying claims young people who view their school environment as safe and supportive are less likely to be involved in risky behaviours (Pyzalski, 2012). Participants in this study evidently felt that the classroom environment was a relatively safe space to justify criticism, even insults, directed at the institution itself, as many graded the risk of posts K and L as low. This may be evidence of a more widespread decline of deference, particularly in relation to traditional authoritative institutions (Giddens, 1991; Young, 2007; Greer and McLaughlin, 2016). Equally, it provides further support for the claim that micro social contexts, friendship and peer norms remain the primary influencing factor in young people's consideration of what is risky or acceptable behaviour (Douglas, 1992;2002; Fox, 1999; Haynie and Osgood, 2005; Pilkington, 2007; Olweus, 2012; Lupton, 2013; Shariff, 2015). Appearing unconcerned about the risk of vilifying one's school on social media is likely to be *less risky* (socially) than appearing concerned about that in front of classmates.

To what extent institutions stifle, tolerate or even enable deviance and criminality is a question unlikely to be answered by this research, but holds huge significance to wider discussions of youth digital risks. Particularly for schools, there remains a huge dilemma of how to manage risky youth behaviour, particularly if it breaks the law. Protectionist responsibilities can manifest as tolerance of certain kinds of misbehaviour, as much as intolerant of others, due to school's unique legal responsibility to provide a safe learning environment and their role 'in loco parentis'. Schools taking a paternalistic approach to 'sexting' and 'cyberbullying' may legally confiscate and search students' mobile phones, while others may attempt to protect students by 'turning a blind eye' to the very same behaviours. Beyond simply policing behaviour, there now exists the more complex issue of policing *the expression* of 'extreme' opinions, with schools in England having a legal duty to report suspected radicalisation of young people to authorities (Dept. for Education, 2015). In addition, safeguarding guidelines state that adults working with children have a responsibility to "be aware of values and attitudes, preconceptions and feelings. Be prepared to challenge any inappropriate language and attitudes, including stereotyping" (NSPCC, 2013). In light of this, it was revealing that the justification of 'opinion' by participants in this research was most commonly used in response to post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say no…"):

"Not saying anything, just opinion" [SB8C]

"It's just opinion, it doesn't mean anything" [SB8C]

"It's just an opinion" [BH9C]

"Own opinion and he's said why he thinks it" [BH10C]

"Just expressing an opinion" [BH13C]

"Really bad but he's put #justsaying so it's just opinion" [BH12C]

'Just expressing an opinion' appears to be the go-to defence for offensive messages, and was almost exclusively used to downgrade the risk. In terms of the legal framework, students' assessment that this was not a criminal or civil risk is correct: there is no current legislation preventing the publication of these kinds of comments. Social media users have been prosecuted by the CPS for sending threats of sexual violence, however, the threshold of harm rests upon whether a message creates anxiety or distress for a recipient, so while rape threats are illegal - including those published on social media - more generalised statements defending rape and blaming rape victims are not.

The response of "it's just their opinion" indicates a defence based on the rights of the sender to free expression. At the end of workshop sessions, it felt necessary to highlight to students that this post is problematic (i.e. factually incorrect perception of the law regarding consent), in an attempt to counter further potential perpetuation of rape myths (see Chapter 2). The view that some people 'deserve to be shot', in response to post A ("Gurkhas are filth…."), was notably *not* justified as 'opinion' to the same extent that the view some people 'deserve to be raped' was. This is no doubt due to social attitudes towards sexual violence more generally:

> "Not only does online sexual violence harm those targeted, it creates a culture where sexual abuse and harassment is expected, tolerated, and/or encouraged, and women and girls are held responsible for their safety and blamed for their victimization. These conditions are now widely characterized as rape culture and online environments are part of this culture" (Fairbairn, 2015: 235)

The online environment is one where it is arguably 'riskier' to express outspokenly feminist viewpoints, than those upholding and reproducing rape culture (see the

overview of the 'Gamergate scandal' and Zoe Quinn, in Salter, 2017.) In this sense it follows that post C might be viewed as not particularly risky by some participants, particularly if considering the social/cultural context.

5.4. Justice, victimhood and retribution

The notion of 'deserving' victims is characteristic of 'Denial of Victim', a technique of neutralisation that insists that a victim is somehow responsible for or deserving of their victimisation, or that they are not really a 'victim' at all (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Responses to posts sometimes indicated the idea that online abuse, insults or threats might perform some kind of 'social justice' function, for example, if the target was in some way provoked this treatment, or the sender had legitimate motive for their conduct:

> *"Might be orange if you know that they're bad or if you'd be abused by them" [BH7A]*
>
> *"It doesn't say why they think that… Without a motive" [BH10A]*
>
> *"If police did arrest them, they might have to investigate why [they said it] 'cause there might be a reason". [BH7F]*
>
> *"If you googled the school it could actually be helpful, you're telling people not to go there". [BH7K]*

These responses indicate that a form of social media 'justice' is perceived by some to be a legitimate defence for online abuse, vilification and threats (Ronson, 2015). Unlike traditional constructs of media justice, this is more individualised, with the narrative being constructed and disseminated by an individual sender, as opposed to being mediated by the press (Greer and McLaughlin, 2012). This would support other research on youth cyberbullying, where students describe a form of 'tit-for-tat' justice, claiming "someone had upset them" or that "they had been bullied first", when asked about their motivations for online harassment (Cassidy et al, 2009). In many ways, this could represent an 'Appeal to Higher Loyalties', if the pursuit of justice was seen to be a more pressing moral concern than offending people or breaching privacy, for example (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

This concept is particularly interesting to consider in context of the rise of what's referred to as the "Alt-Right" movement online[16]. Racist, misogynistic, homophobic, ablest, transphobic and Islamophobic attacks via social media are frequently framed and discussed by perpetrators as if they were fighting perceived 'injustices' in society (Salter, 2017). The mass online 'trolling' of Zoe Quinn was re-framed as an online political protest against women's 'undeserved prominence in gaming', as a result of 'sexual collusion' and 'journalistic corruption', eventually morphing into the phenomenon known as 'Gamergate' (Salter, 2017:44). On some level, this served a function of freeing individuals to participate in Quinn's harassment, without serious damage to their self-image or the negative emotions of blame or guilt – the very function of techniques of neturalisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 667). The concept of 'freedom of speech' as a disguised 'appeal to higher loyalties' could theoretically be applied to some 'Alt-Right' social media users. Media commentators specifically describe "liberty, free speech and the right to offend" as the movement's moral "touchstones" (Cook, 2016). This is just one of several ways in which broader social, political and cultural contexts may influence young people's perceptions of risk, responsibility and rights in the online environment.

Another common response when children were asked why they engage in online abuse is "because it was fun" (Cassiy et al, 2009: 390). Similarly, within this study, participants claim that "humour" and "ambiguity" were justifications to downgrade the risk of certain kinds of online content. The notion of "just saying" or "just [expressing] opinion" is also used to downplay seriousness and neutralise risk, through denial of injury and/or responsibility. Wilson (2017) claims that humour and ambiguity are also utilised by the 'Alt-Right' in order to deliberately "wrong foot" opponents. As with student responses to post H ("Peter: You are gay…"), a victim or target can be positioned as in the wrong for 'taking offence', if the intention was simply to have a laugh; another convenient denial of responsibility. The very concept of 'victimisation' is used by Alt-Right pin-ups, such as Milo Yiannopoulos, to undermine critics or those offended by online hate speech. Victimisation is even argued - conversely and perversely - to result in undeserved *power and privilege* for those targeted: "Instead of creativity, talent and boldness, those who succeed are often those who can best demonstrate outrage, grievance and victimhood" (Yiannopoulos, 2016). Rather

[16] The use of this term is argued by some to be problematic, but is nonetheless generally agreed to be the most appropriate term to describe the particular phenomenon (Milhailidis and Viotty, 2017).

conveniently for Yiannopoulos, anyone offended by this perspective is then constructed as being the very embodiment of it.

So-called 'trolling' (publishing offensive, threatening or abusive content online), is simultaneously constructed as being both 'not serious' and yet 'political'; morally justifiable, and yet requiring techniques of neutralisation (Barlett, 2014; Sykes and Matza, 1957). The diversity of justifications emerging from student discussions, combined with the range of risk-rating assigned to different posts does suggest huge underlying uncertainty – perhaps even anxiety, of the kind that Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) describe - with the individual forced to choose how to live, and then forced to individually bear the consequences of their decisions. Cultural/symbolic processes of 'othering' and 'boundary maintenance' serve a social function to strengthen community ties, and this potentially explains some of the ideological and political battles being fought in online spaces (Douglas, 1986;1992;2002). Salter (2017) claims perpetrators of cyber abuse view themselves as having their (traditionally, white, male, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied) rights and privileges marginalised in the wake of an influx of women, racial minorities, LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities into 'their' public online spaces. In this sense, deviant and even illegal behaviour on social media can be conceptualised as a way of managing other risks (or rather 'risks from others'): an attempt to assert power and exercise control. As previously highlighted, it may not be the case that behaviours are not viewed as being morally problematic or risky at all; Rather, there is an ongoing process of negotiating a *hierarchy* of risk or morality. Being 'in with the right social group' in an age of individualisation potentially trumps other considerations.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ways in which posts may be justified and defended by participants in relation to individual sender's rights, with a particular focus on techniques of neutralisation. The premise of this theory is that individuals who engage in criminal, deviant or risky behaviour hold the same (rather than opposing) norms and values to 'conventional' or mainstream society, and therefore rely upon these mechanisms to maintain a sense of moral validity in the wake of their behaviour (Sykes and Matza, 1957:665). In this study, it is not offenders who are sampled to retrospectively reflect on past behaviours, instead, participants represent a social audience of young peers. The factors discussed include a particular focus on emerging themes of 'individual rights' of the sender, either to express their opinions, exhibit humour, speak the truth, or retaliate in pursuit of social media 'justice'. The

defence of certain content and conduct indicate that the behaviour is not necessarily considered morally acceptable per se, as *recognition* of deviance is required for the techniques of neutralisation to be used. The subsequent chapter will therefore move further to explore the issues of where there is *no* sense of guilt, shame, blame or remorse, referencing Cohen's 'states of denial' (2001), and the extent to which abuse is perceived as widespread and 'normal' online. In addition to the participants' perceptions of 'no' consequences for behaviour, perceived or imagined consequences of both formal and informal sanctions will be examined, as well as how these perceptions influence the risk ratings allocated to different example posts.

CHAPTER SIX: Imagining consequences

Introduction

Constructs of risk inevitably relate to consideration of the potential consequences of our actions. What makes 'risk' different from naturally occurring dangers or hazards is the element of human influence; risks are essentially 'man-made' (Lupton, 1999a). Risk is not only constructed as potentially being influenced or averted by human action, but also as arising directly *as a result* of human action. This is also the case with crime and deviance, as constructions of risk are situated within an existing social, cultural, political and moral order (Lupton, 2013). As previously highlighted (Chapter 1), risky or dangerous behaviours may be controlled by law or criminalised, while other behaviours may be deemed risky *because* they are illegal and carry a risk of sanctions. In this sense, social controls do not just arise as a result of deviance; rather, it is the social controls that also *produce* deviance (Becker, 1973). The creation of rules and boundaries (whether explicit or implied) is what simultaneously produces 'rule-breaking' and 'rule breakers'. The same could also be said for risk: Real or imagined potential negative consequences can influence whether behaviour might be considered 'risky', and this is why this is the focus of this final analysis chapter. This will be divided into four main areas: Firstly, perceptions of sanctions/'formal' social controls (e.g. police, courts, criminal/legal responses); Secondly, perceptions of 'informal' social controls (e.g. schools, parents, peers, reputational damage etc.); Thirdly, perceptions of no sanctions or consequences – an ambivalence towards or denial of deviance (e.g. behaviour is ignored, widespread, normalised or unproblematic. No social reaction per se). Finally, constructs of consequences for others beyond the sender (e.g. negative impacts on recipient(s), audience or targets, potential social harm caused) will be examined.

6.1. Perceptions of formal social controls/sanctions

a. Police action and criminal consequences

"Criminal law is [just] one means through which the State establishes rules and standards of conduct expected from its citizens" (Savirimuthu, 2012: 62). As explained to participants by the researcher, criminal consequences for breaking the law might include police investigation, arrest, prosecution, fines or even a prison sentence. As well as serving a practical purpose (e.g. a tool for imposing sanctions), the passing of legislation also plays a symbolic social function, indicating to citizens

what is considered problematic, dangerous, risky or immoral within a society. Criminalising certain behaviours does not mean criminal sanctions are inevitable for offenders, however. This can at times be intentional, sometimes known as "law in books" vs. "law in action" (Matthews, 2005:179). This is sometimes the case with regard to social media offences committed by children, where it may be unlikely to be deemed in the public interest to proceed with prosecution (CPS, 2018). That is not to say that it does not remain a risk for adolescents, as the statistics in Chapter 1 highlight, particularly with offences relating to indecent images of under-18s. There remains a tension between what the laws against such acts are intended to do in principle (protect children from abuse) and what applying the letter of the law means in practice (criminalising more children):

> "The rationale behind child pornography legislation has traditionally been to punish adults who sexually abuse and exploit children. Although it may be possible that even when intimate pictures have been taken consensually, without duress, these could later be exploited and lead to harm (for instance when those pictures are distributed on a large scale e.g. when a relationship has ended), it seems disproportionate to apply legislation with such heavy sanctions, and potentially life-ruining consequences to minors." (Lievans, 2011: 46)

Calls for police and legislators to 'crack down' on digitally deviant behaviour among young people have been around for more than a decade, however these have not always garnered support from those who work within the criminal justice system (Meikle, 2007). A study involving interviews with Canadian police officers that responded to cyber bullying incidents found all were *opposed* to creating new criminal laws to deal with the issue (Broll and Huey, 2015). They also felt the criminalisation of children for "everyday cyberbullying activities" (i.e. being mean to people) was unnecessarily punitive, and that education would be best method for preventing and reducing cyber abuse (ibid: 170). These arguments echo broader concerns about children and crime more generally, and fears that legal interventions risk criminalising children for 'being naughty' (Crook, 2012; Goldson, 2013). In addition to police officers exercising discretion with individual cases, the devolution of police authority means that different geographical areas of the UK may have different priorities and approaches to tackling cybercrime or sexting, resulting in variation in how different forces choose to prosecute (Muir, 2015; Cheshire, 2014). This provides further support for adopting a labelling theory approach to studying crime and deviance: "The

same piece of physical action can be treated as either deviant or non-deviant depending upon the label applied to it, or, and importantly, upon the social context in which it occurs" (Taylor et al, 1973:145)

With this context in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is confusion and diversity among students' perceptions of what criminal consequences exist for online offending. The only standout example post that prompted discussion of police (re)action with any sense of *certainty* was post D ("…@HeathrowAirport…) The level of consensus for the seriousness of the act - and the potential criminal consequences - was greater than for any other of the twelve example posts, with responses indicating a sense of inevitability of police intervention:

> *"CAN be arrested for a terrorism threat" [SB7D]*
>
> *"Because they [police/security] have to assume the worst, if they don't know" [BH7D]*
>
> *"Police would get involved". [SB8D]*
>
> *"Even a joke would have to be taken seriously, as if it's an actual threat" [SB13D]*
>
> *"Arrested for a threat" [BH9D]*
>
> *"If you mention the word bomb you'd get arrested, if they have any suspicions" [BH9D]*

This example, loosely based upon Paul Chambers' tweet, is unlikely to be prosecuted given that the original sender successfully won his appeal against his conviction on the grounds that the message was not 'menacing' (Bowcott, 2012). Yet, students' perceptions are that a police arrest would be somewhat *inevitable* for a sender who posted a message like this online, 'even as a joke' (Chapter 5). This is a strong example of the symbolic power of the law acting as a potential deterrent against undesirable behaviours, even when they're unlikely to break the law. The perception of criminal consequence is higher than the reality, which contrasts with many of the other examples, where students tended to *under*-estimate the criminal risks. This also suggests crimes related to 'terrorism' are viewed as riskier than other criminal cyber

offences, such as harassment. The perception that the “mention” of “the word” “bomb” results in arrest adds some weight to concerns from legal scholars that criminal laws governing social media communications may risk violating the rights of users to freedom of expression (Rowbotton, 2012;2017).

Meanwhile, threatening or menacing messages targeting individuals were not viewed as having the same risk of criminal consequences, with fewer students opting for the red (criminal) category during discussions. In fact, only one student asserted that they felt that post F (“Waiting at the gates for my little friend…”) would be *“taken quite seriously” [BH12F].* There was, however, disagreement about the meaning of this post, and whether or not it pertained to a threat of violence, paedophilia and/or confession of previous acts of physical or sexual violence (see Chapters 3 and 5). And, in any case, the response suggests ‘serious’ consequences, but does not detail specifically what those might be, or who would be responsible for them. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that this indicates perceptions of police action (it could refer to informal consequences, such as school or parental action, for example). There is some indication that threats against individuals online are not perceived to be as criminally risky as threats of terrorism, or threats against groups of people, which may be underpinned by ideas about power and responsibility (Chapter 4).

Expressions of hatred targeting protected identity groups were commonly perceived to risk criminal consequences, although not unanimously. Some students clearly recognised racism and homophobia, and identified a criminal risk, for example in response to posts A (“Gurkhas are filth…”), post E (“I'm sick to death of ****ing dykes…”), post H (“Peter: You are GAY…”) and post J (“Beyonce is nothing…”):

> *“Hate crime. Can be jailed* [for that] [BH8A]
>
> *“Homophobia, could be arrested. It's a hate crime” [BH8E]*
>
> *“Could be arrested” [BH8E]*
>
> *“It's homophobic. That's a criminal offence” [BH7H]*
>
> *“Homophobic language. You can get arrested” [BH8H]*
>
> *“[R] It's racism. "Black" [comment] is racist” [BH7J]*

"[R] cause it's racist towards Beyonce. You'd get 6 months in jail" [BH8J]

Once again though, responses indicate some of uncertainty with the words 'could' and 'can' preceding the possibility of arrest more frequently than the 'would' of the example involving a potential threat towards Heathrow Airport (post D). This suggests students believe there is a *risk* of criminal consequences, but this is by no means an inevitable outcome. It appears that the certainty of the label applied ('that's racist'; 'that's homophobic', or even 'that's a crime') does not always align with perceived certainty of formal sanctions. Uncertainty over what constitutes online criminal forms of speech (outlined in Chapter 3) may reflect confusion among the wider British public: in 2017, the CPS issued a statement to clarify that prosecution guidelines for online hate crimes would be the same as for 'offline' hate crimes (CPS, 2017b). Participants perspectives appear to reflect Matthews' (2005) point about law being social symbolic and not always resulting 'in action'. It is also possible that by the time children reach secondary school they have become aware that reactions to deviant behaviour may differ depending on who is exhibiting the behaviour, and in what circumstances (Becker, 1973; Lemert, 1981).

The most surprising finding from this study is that sharing indecent images of children did *not* elicit certainty of police involvement or criminal consequences. Only two students specifically discussed the risk of arrest for sharing a sexual video of a potentially underage girl (post G: "You gotta watch this video of Alice…"):

"Sharing videos, if it's porn you and they could be arrested if they're underage?" [SB8G]

"Alice could press charges, depending on her age" [BH9G]

Notably, police action is still only framed as a possibility, in contrast with the certainty of example post D ("…@HeathrowAirport...") In addition, in both responses, the victim is to some degree responsibilised: For the first, 'you *and they* could be arrested', suggesting Alice might face police action, and with the second response, Alice is the one who must actively seek justice, and 'press charges', for criminal consequences to occur. The general lack of discussion of police intervention for sharing an indecent video content of a young person is totally at odds with what was expected, especially considering how many educational and police initiatives (such as campaigns by

CEOP) have taken place in schools to tackle underage 'sexting', Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and 'revenge porn':

> "Formal education does not determine, but likely influences the perceptions of young people towards the digitally mediated environment – including roles of authority, appropriate behavioural norms and risk perception (currently dominated by the threat of child sexual abuse)." (Barnard-Wills, 2012:239)

Student perceptions at first appear to contradict messaging in formal education about the risks of sharing indecent images, however, on closer inspection the opposite may be true. The dominant narrative of many initiatives aimed at preventing abuse emphasise *abstinence* from 'sexting' as a risk management strategy: potential victims are urged to think about their behaviour and take precautions, so as not be victimised. Girls (predominantly) are targeted and responsibilised to manage potential risks and prevent negative outcomes. In this sense, the 'appropriate behavioural norm' for girls is presented as abstaining from sexual expression or activity in order to protect themselves, not only from sexual predators but also from social shame (Karaian, 2013; Doring, 2014; Albury, 2017; Salter, 2017). Students' perceptions of criminal risk (arising from criminal culpability) for a sender in this scenario are notably underestimated, and responsibilisation of 'Alice' (the victim) more common. This becomes less surprising when one considers the emphasis placed upon consequences for *victims*, rather than perpetrators of digital sexual abuse in school-based intervention programmes.

Similarly, few students recognised the criminal risk involved in potentially identifying an underage sexual offences claimant in response to post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"):

> *"If true then [R] because you've given out the names of people doing a crime" [BH9I]*

> *"Giving away the name of who it is. Isn't that illegal?" [BH9I]*

As previously mentioned, the criminal risk is linked to 'naming' (identification), but it is not specifically the naming of an alleged victim that is identified as problematic: "Who it is" could refer to the alleged perpetrator (Mr Sanders), potentially prioritising his right to anonymity (as the accused) rather than that of the alleged victim. Equally, "the names of people doing a crime" implies culpability on the part of 'Jenny' as being

similar to that of an adult alleged perpetrator. The implication is that criminal risk is viewed as reduced when a victim is vulnerable or individualised, while increasing for when the victim is a group, higher status or if it relates to terror offences. When considering consequences, students' risk analysis shifts away from the behaviour of an individual sender, toward a broader social context: Essentially, the likelihood of police action depends more upon *who* is being victimised (Chapter 4). This provides some support for the argument that risks are not constructed equally, but firmly rooted within existing social hierarchies: "high levels of anxiety about risk phenomena of all kinds are intertwined with uncertainties about socio-cultural order" (Crook, in Lupton, 1999a:10).

b. Points of reference for criminal consequences

It is also interesting to highlight and discuss students' references for their knowledge about criminal risks. Risk Society approaches highlight that the 'ideal citizen' is one who is knowledgeable about risk, and rationally acts accordingly to manage those risks (Beck 1992). There are parallels with this and classical theories of criminal deterrence: the concept of the 'rational' offender who is knowledgeable about the consequences of lawbreaking being deterred from committing crime (Beccaria, 1764/2009). These constructs of the rational, knowledgeable, law-abiding citizen continue to influence modern ways of thinking about crime and policing: "effective criminal law requires that citizens understand that certain conduct is prohibited… And the consequences for doing what the law prohibits" (Arthur, 2012: 14; Apel, 2013). There are obvious critical questions about what this means for child offenders varying in age, education, experiences and abilities (Gillen, 2006; Elliott 2011; Muncie, 2014). Yet some students in this study demonstrated that real life case studies had informed their knowledge of criminal consequences for online behaviour. This was particularly the case for posts that indicated threatening messages and libellous/defamatory messages:

> *"[It would be] Taken seriously, because someone put online that they were going to stab their teacher and they did"* [SB13A]

> *"I heard a news story similar to this and the girl did get arrested, so [RED]. It's taken seriously [BH9D]*

> *"It's happened before and someone got arrested" [BH8D]*

"We watched a social media programme where someone sent death threats and you can be arrested for that" [SB7A]

"Nowadays police are more up for investigating this stuff, because of recent events. [I ask what he means]. Operation Yewtree" [SB13F]

"Liberachi sued [people] for saying he was gay. Slander." [SB13H]

"If Alan Davies said it [reference to Lord McAlpine Twitter libel case] and loads of people could see it then [O]" [BH12J]

These responses raise interesting questions around societal obligations to communicate risk, in this case the criminal/legal consequences of online behaviour, to young citizens (Powell-Jones, 2018). Equally, they highlight the potential for social amplification of certain risks (Kasperson et al, 2003; Kasperson and Kasperson, 2005). As previously highlighted, students perceive that police action for the Paul Chambers' style airport threat was somewhat inevitable – but no students seemed aware of the successful appeal against his conviction. News media coverage of high-profile prosecutions or lawsuits for social media postings may contribute to the perception that certain behaviours are riskier than others. This shows how there is a fine line for educators between raising awareness of which laws (and penalties) exist for social media offences amongst young people, while avoiding total responsibilisation of young people to 'self-manage', or contributing to disproportionate anxiety or panics about risk (Rose, 1996A; Jackson and Scott, 1999; Garland, 1997;2000; Ungar, 2001; Kelly, 2001). In any case, students demonstrating awareness of the law and the consequences of lawbreaking does not mean that this will reduce their likelihood of offending or alter behaviour in any way. Previous studies show that cyber-bullying education initiatives tend to increase reporting rates of incidents, but the evidence on how it affects student behaviour online is inconclusive (Mishna et al., 2011; Schilder et al., 2016). We must avoid too much emphasis on 'rational' risk knowledge, since "risk avoidance and risk taking behaviours may actually be more to do with habits than anything else" (Lupton, 1999a: 121).

c. Risks of litigation from victims

The risk of being sued was the most commonly perceived outcome overall by students in response to the example twelve posts. The consequence of a sender being taken to court was a particularly common perceived outcome for mocking or threatening posts targeting an individual, such as F ("Waiting at the gates for my little friend…") and H ("Peter: You are GAY…"):

> *"The person it's aimed at could sue?" [SB7F]*
>
> *"You don't know if they're joking or not, but you could sue anyway" [BH7F]*
>
> *"You could be sued by the kid's parents" [BH9F]*
>
> *"Cause Peter could sue the guy saying it" [BH7H]*
>
> *"If Peter is not gay, then right to sue" [SB13H]*

The distribution of indecent images implied in post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") also provoked a similar response in terms of imagined consequences:

> *"She might want it to be confidential, might not want people to see it, but it is her fault anyway for sending it, but she could still sue" [BH7G]*
>
> *"Sued by Alice's family" [BH9G]*
>
> *"If it's not very nice then [O] she would sue who did it, if she doesn't want it shared" [BH10G]*
>
> *"If Alice put up the video [herself] then [G]. You've made your bed, you've got to lie in it. If another person did, then [O] cause there's no consent" [BH12G]*
>
> *"Alice could sue, if he named her" [BH12G]*

The idea of suing for damages, as opposed to informing police, after being criminally victimised potentially provides some support for risk being experienced individually in 'neoliberal Risk Societies': A more individualised method of obtaining justice (e.g. the

victim suing someone who wronged them) potentially replaces more traditional, collective structures for justice (e.g. the police/state prosecuting an offender on behalf of the victim). “Processes of individualisation also visit new forms of responsibility on young people and their families to prudently manage individual ‘reflexive biographical projects’” (Kelly, 2001:31; See also: Burchell, 1996). Participant responses potentially highlight implicit (or explicit) responsibilisation of victims or their family/parents, to (re)act in response to victimisation. If the ‘ideal citizen’ is one who actively constructs and shapes their biographical narrative, then it is easy to see how this extends even to victims of crime. Passive or determinist attitudes are culturally disparaged in the Risk Society, even if someone is vulnerable or victimised; instead, the ‘ideal’ response involves an individual taking *action*, taking control, and actively shaping the outcomes that are desirable for them (Beck, 1992; Trnka and Trundle, 2014). The narrative being (re)produced is: ‘if you have been wronged, you must make it right’ (e.g. by taking legal action). To some extent, this also echoes narratives observed in media coverage of sexual assault cases, where women are frequently dichotomised as ‘passive victims’ or the increasingly more socially acceptable ‘heroic survivors’, speaking out and actively pursuing justice (Alcoff and Grey, 1993; Kitzinger, 2009). These narratives suggest that the harm created through victimisation *belongs to victims*; perhaps contributing to the perspective that it is victims’ (‘Alice’ or her family) task to address these wrongs, rather than the state, the school or society generally.

In their book on sexual violence in the digital age, Powell and Henry (2017: 278) discuss how women have started using social media to name and shame perpetrators, speak out about their experiences, or take and share ‘survivor selfies’ as a way of obtaining justice “outside of the state”. Similarly, in the wake of the revelations about Harvey Weinstein, women used social media to post statuses of “#Metoo” in solidarity with victims of sexual harassment and assault, whilst also aiming to demonstrate how widespread the problem is (Sini, 2017). While, for the most part, this was praised as an example of collective feminist activism, the movement was also criticised as a demonstration of the continuing implicit responsibility of victims (individually or collectively) to highlight and address the problem of male sexual misconduct (Flores, 2017). The victim who ‘self-seeks’ justice through alternative means than the criminal justice system is, of course, emblematic of failure on the part of the state and other institutions, but also upholds the concept of the ‘ideal citizen’ (or in this case, the ideal ‘victim-survivor’) who self-manages risk, and takes individual responsibility for obtaining justice, rather than relying on the state or others (Beck, 1992; 2006; Greer and McLaughlin, 2016). This is problematic if we

consider that some younger victims may too feel responsibility to 'manage' their victimisation, and avoid seeking adult support, as has been shown can be the case with bullying (Li, 2010; Cowie and Myers, 2014; Purdy and York, 2016).

Civil litigation wasn't entirely constructed as a matter solely for individuals, however, as shown by participant responses to racist and homophobic messages (posts A and E) and a post justifying rape (post C):

"Could be sued by the Gurkhas" [SB8A]

"Could be sued by them [Gurkhas]" [BH9A]

"Rape victims could sue" [SB7C]

"Could be sued by rape victims?" [BH10C]

"Could be sued? [I ask 'by who?'] By all lesbians? [laughter] [BH10E]

"Get sued - by lesbians" [SB7E]

"Wouldn't get arrested but could get sued" [SB8E]

The collective laugher in response to a Year 10 pupil's suggestion that "all lesbians" could sue the sender implies that collective litigation is seen as a somewhat ridiculous (i.e. unlikely) consequence of hate speech. Yet this still raises the question, if the offence is a civil matter, then whose responsibility is it perceived to be to file a lawsuit against the perpetrator? Not 'all' lesbians, perhaps (this is acknowledged as silly). Some lesbians? Which, in turn, raises the question, why lesbians at all? Even as an offhand, humorous comment, it nonetheless reinforces the idea that those perceived as most *likely* to be responsible for taking action against abusers are those who are directly targeted and victimised, rather than an authority taking action on their behalf, such as the police. If your victimisation is perceived as your responsibility, by extension, homophobia can be dismissed as a problem for the gay community to be responsible for taking action on.

The suggestion is that prejudiced or offensive material targeting a particular group (whether rape victims, BAME or LGBT+) is perceived to potentially provoke collective

action to seek justice. Yet, this is still framed somewhat as a matter for those groups (read: victims) to take responsibility for addressing themselves. To a certain degree, this reproduces and reinforces the myth that homophobia, racism, sexual assault etc. are problems to be confronted and dealt with *by those who are victimised,* rather than other groups, such as bystanders, the police, or society as a whole. Particularly with cases of bullying, cyberbullying, and other forms of power abuse, strategies for tackling these issues often involve suggestions of educating and empowering witnesses/bystanders to take action (Deschamps and McNutt, 2016). It is argued that it is especially important for 'allies', who may have more power and privilege than victims, to be encouraged to speak up in cases where there are obvious power inequalities between an offender and victim (Katz, 2015). Some scholars have even suggested that bystanders should be held legally accountable for failing to report concerns that a victim may be physically harmed (Benzmiller, 2013). While guidance on best practice for bystander interventions remain unclear, it is unsurprising that students tend to construct prejudice and power inequalities as something that victims themselves must stand up against (Polanin, Espelage and Pigott, 2012). In fact, the role of a witness or a bystander taking legal action was considered only once during workshops, when a student claimed that "*anyone reading it" [SB7F]* (in this case, a threatening message) could sue the sender. Efforts to engage 'audiences'/witnesses to victimisation as a strategy for supporting victims of online abuse remain challenging to put into practice, as various studies on the 'bystander effect', 'moral disengagement' and the 'diffusion of responsibility' have highlighted (Leary & Forsythe, 1987; Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975; Bandura, 2002; Salmivalli, 2014). The responses from participants of this study also indicates that witness/bystander intervention was generally not perceived to be a 'risk' to senders posting abusive or threatening messages online.

d. Risk of litigation from school

Many students discussed the risk of being sued by a school for comments posted on social media, notably in response to a post that directly mentioned the school (K: "Collingwood college is an absolute dump…"):

> *"College could sue for saying it's bad" [BH8K]*

> *"Sued for slander about the school, if it's not been proved" [BH9K]*

"Could be sued for saying it, by the school" [BH9K]

"Sued, maybe by a student or a parent" [BH13K]

This reveals interesting constructions of risk and power, as many students perceived criticism or negative publicity about the school to result in potential legal action, either from the institution itself, or those connected to it (parents/students). This appears to reinforce the idea of the institution as primarily concerned with protecting reputation, rather than pupils (Gardner, 2012; Greer and McLaughlin, 2016). In terms of power relations, the institution may be viewed as having power to hold individuals within it (pupils) to account, but not so much the reverse: Not a single participant raised the idea of a student, or anyone else, being able to *sue the school* in any of the scenarios. The closest indication of a school being held accountable for protecting pupils was in response to post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"), when one Year 7 stated, "*the school could be in trouble for bullying" [SB7G].* Schools in the UK have a legal responsibility for children's welfare and must have anti-bullying policies and procedures in place – including for incidents 'outside of the school premises' (e.g. online) (Cowie and Myers, 2018). However, participants' responses perhaps indicate less of a focus on the school responsibility towards pupils, instead emphasising the risks to pupils who undermine the school's reputation.

This perspective is further reinforced by responses to post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"), which potentially indicates sexual abuse of a pupil, by a teacher, on school premises. Yet, 'the school' was not generally constructed as being in any kind of trouble. Rather, the school and the staff member, were considered more likely to bring legal action against a sender (potentially another pupil at the school):

"Mr Sanders could sue, because you're spreading rumours" [BH7I]

"About someone in school, could be sued or in trouble" [SB8I]

"You'd get told off or maybe sued by the teacher" [BH8I]

"Teacher could sue you for saying that" [BH8I]

"It's a lie so you could be sued for that" [BH9I]

"Teacher could lose his job if it's not true, and could also sue if it's false" [BH9I]

"Mr Sanders could sue if it's not true" [BH10I]

"Harsh about the teacher. Sued?" [BH12I]

"School could sue?" [BH13I]

"The school or the head could sue because you're making an accusation" [BH13I]

Again, this generally seems to reinforce the construction of the institution (and those who function as part of it, i.e. teachers) as more powerful than individuals who are contained within the institution (i.e. pupils). Even the individual's right to 'speak out' (presuming claims made in the post could be true) is potentially quashed by the right of the institution, and the alleged perpetrator, to protect their reputation. There is a perception of there being risk simply *'for making an accusation'.* Legal action is framed as being initiated by those with the most power, which in turn suggests that law itself may be understood as a tool for punitive retribution, rather than a rights-based tool for justice. These perceptions are no doubt connected to wider constructs of risk and power in society, reproduced and reinforced by media coverage of institutional 'scandals' and victims (Greer and McLaughlin, 2016). When criminal accusations emerge, it tends to be the notion of institution *knowledge* (and concealment) that creates the scandal, as much as the behaviour of individuals. A recent high-profile example from the news media is Weinstein's former assistant revealing that she was forced to sign a non-disclosure agreement as part of a sexual harassment settlement (BBC News, 2017b). Stories such as these perhaps reinforce fear and suspicion among the general public that legal 'solutions' may prioritise the 'rights' of those with most power, wealth and status, and this is what makes 'making accusations' against them risky.

The risks of being sued provide insight no only into perceptions of 'whose' rights are prioritised, but also 'which' rights. For example, one student suggested that the person responsible for post D ("… @HeathrowAirport…") could *sue the police* if they were arrested: "*Could sue if the police arrested you and its [bomb] not there" [BH7D]*. This is somewhat contradictory to the perspectives discussed in the previous

paragraph, where the individual's rights are seen to trump the police's responsibility to arrest and investigate threats. It could potentially signify a prioritising of the right itself, with 'freedom of expression' being held in highest esteem (discussed in Chapter 5). It could also be that the institution of the police, which in turn may represent the state, is viewed as having diminishing authority, facing a decline in deference and, conversely, therefore at risk of litigation from citizens (Young, 2007; Greer and McLaughlin, 2016). Individual rights and powers are perhaps seen as being 'on par' with institutions such as the police; yet, this was not the case for the institution of the *school*, perhaps due to lowly social status of children more generally (Jackson, 1982).

Other rights, such as intellectual property, also arose as a litigation risk in relation to post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"): *"Copyright issue so [O] depends if you're sharing a video that's yours or not yours" [BH9G].* It is notable that for this student, copyright infringement is viewed as the primary risk, above privacy or other legal or criminal repercussions. This perhaps indicates a perspective that legal rights primarily exist for the protection of *property*, rather than other such rights of individuals. While this may initially seem like a bizarre assessment, the reality is that until very recently, copyright law was one of a few limited legal tools available to revenge porn victims seeking justice (i.e. forcing removal of images from online platforms and/or pursuing damages from perpetrators) (Henry and Powell, 2014; Fiedler, 2014; Pollack, 2016). The pivotal factor in this students' assessment of risk was legal ownership of the content, suggesting shifting concepts of power and rights in favour of content *owners* as opposed to the subjects featured in material. This also suggests how knowledge of media laws may become confused with understandings of human rights in law, further emphasising a need for education in this area (Powell-Jones, 2018).

Overall, students' perceptions of formal sanctions demonstrate a need to not only ensure that human rights are central considerations when reforming law for the digital age, but that these legal rights and remedies are communicated to and made accessible to young people. Young cyber victims need to be made aware of ther rights to protection and potential legal solutions available to them as victims, without being individually responsibilised for taking action, particularly in the case of criminal offences. This is especially important when institutions and adults tend to occupy the primary position of responsibility and power, and their concepts of the digital world may differ from those of young people:

> "We cannot pit the digital against fundamental rights. Instead, we must ask how the digital might support diverse children to become aware of, claim and enact their rights. We need to move beyond the idea that children's digital practices constitute a specialized set of activities cleaved off from the so-called 'real world'. We must concern ourselves not only with 'what happens online' but also with how what happens online is entwined with the conditions and possibilities of children's everyday lives" (Livingstone and Third, 2017:667)

6.2. Informal sanctions/social controls

> "Youth who consider their roles in various online contexts, understand the responsibilities that are implied by them, and *imagine the larger implications of various judgments*, are well-poised to engage in good play" (James et al, 2009:276 - my emphasis).

The moral and emotional aspects of deviance and risk-taking must be acknowledged as much as official legislation and criminal sanctions. Austen (2009: 461) highlights that children's perception of high levels of risk were informed "by a reaction to the perceived consequences (blame and guilt)". Admitting risky behaviour can be shameful, even if one manages to avoid official sanctions, and in this sense it overlaps with social constructs of deviance: the social and emotional reactions in a sense create the risk (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Becker, 1973; Cohen, 2001). Formal and informal social consequences are essentially what define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour within a group or culture (Douglas, 1992; 2002). However, it is not just behaviour per se that separates and marks out 'deviants', but rather the interpretation of behaviour and the response from 'conventional' and 'conforming' members of society (Kitsuse, 1962). Managing the emotional fallout of risky or deviant behaviour – e.g. judgements of blame, shame and guilt - is therefore a fundamental driver for techniques of neutralisation (discussed in Chapter 5). Perceptions of informal sanctions, including fear of social judgement, helps provide understanding of the labelling process outside of formal systems, such as the legal or criminal justice system. This section will therefore explore participants' perceptions of informal sanctions in response to the example posts.

a. Technology companies/social media platforms

Discussions among participants about the potential for social media companies to intervene and sanction offensive or illegal posts was fairly limited, and restricted only to post J ("Beyoncé is nothing …"):

> *"Might just get their account blocked?" [BH8J]*

> *"[Y] You'd probably just be told to take it down or delete it off social media" [BH13J]*

Many of the other example posts (indecent video content, homophobic and racist threats/hate speech and material contravening contempt or libel laws) did not provoke any discussion of the risk of social media companies responding. Even in the case of post J, these responses do not suggest that this kind of consequence is particularly 'risky', as the sender will "just" get their account blocked, or "just" be asked to remove the content, which implies that this is not something that is particularly serious for the sender. The certainty of this consequence is also questioned, with words like "might" and "probably" suggesting that this outcome is still considered quite unlikely. Salter (2017: 52-57) has critiqued the (lack of) response from social media platforms to deal with issues like online harassment, claiming changes to policy for users "have proven to be largely symbolic gestures" that "offer very limited protections for those particularly vulnerable", specifically women, religious and ethnic minorities, and people who are disabled or LGBT+. Students' limited discussion of the possibility of technology companies policing social media or enforcing sanctions implies that among young users perhaps do not perceive sites like YouTube, Twitter or Facebook as particularly likely to enforce these kinds of policies. As risk is inextricably linked to notions of responsibility, it could be argued that social media companies' apparent lack of perceived responsibility to manage these risks may contribute to the behaviour being viewed as less risky (this will be discussed further in the section on 'no consequences').

b. The school

Schools remain a primary site for 'policing' children's behaviour and have the ability to impose their own sanctions upon pupils who violate rules. For many, this is deemed preferable to police involvement, especially for minors:

> "The sanctions for violating school policies prohibiting bullying – counselling, parental/teacher intervention, suspension or exclusion – are preferable where clear violations of the criminal law have not taken place" (Savirimuthu, 2012:131).

There is a tension and contradiction here: One the one hand, many schools and parents would perhaps prefer for 'internal' moral authorities to take responsibility for sanctioning young people, without needing 'outside' police involvement. This can be problematic; especially in cases when serious criminal offences, such as sexual assault have be perpetrated on site (Cowie and Myers, 2018; Ringrose et al, 2012). This can be analysed as being part of a Cultural/Symbolic approach to risk management, with risks needing to be 'contained' within a community (Douglas, 1992; 2002). On the other hand, schools and parents may simultaneously demand additional laws and increased policing resources to deal with youth cyberbullying incidents, even in cases where it may be unnecessary. Broll and Huey's (2015) interviews highlight an incident where a police officer was asked by a parent to inform a fellow pupil that their child no longer wanted to be friends with them anymore, after an online dispute. Whether this role is expanding or shrinking, the institution of the school is generally considered as having primary responsibility for managing children's risky behaviour, especially when it involves peer-to-peer offences, but with the option to 'upscale' or 'outsource' to other experts, such as police or parents where necessary.

Much like the perception of the risk of civil litigation from the school, the risk of a school imposing sanctions on a sender seem to have been mainly applied to example posts that *specifically reference* the school itself, such as post K ("Collingwood College is an absolute dump…") and L ("Ah, *****. Double science first thing…"):

> *"School could kick them out" [SB8K]*

> *"Saying that school is annoying, you might be in trouble with the school" [BH8L]*

> *"Told off for coming into school with a bad head" [BH8L]*

> *"If underage then [Y] - If the teacher or parents saw it" [BH12L]*

"[Y] School would tell you off. You'd be in trouble for coming in with a hangover" [BH13L]

"Told off" [BH7L]

"Told off? [Y] for the swearing" [BH8L]

This suggests participants may consider a school's authority and power as primarily relating to - once again - its own reputation, or geographical site. Other examples of digital offences, including post F ("waiting at the gate", implying near to school property), post G or post H (it would be reasonable to assume 'Alice' and 'Peter' represent fellow pupils), did not appear to provoke much discussion of teacher intervention. Under the Education and Inspection Act 2006, schools in England have a moral and legal duty to prevent and address bullying between pupils, even when the behaviour is occurring outside of school or online (El Asam and Samara, 2016; Cowie and Myers, 2018). Students' lack of reference to informal school sanctions may simply be explained by the fact that they have opted for more serious risk categories (i.e. criminal or civil consequences), which could be seen to negate the need to consider and discuss less formal consequences from the school. Nevertheless, it seems strange that the school itself is noticeably absent from participants' discussion as an authority for managing risk, sanctioning perpetrators, or helping victims, considering it is the primary institution for young people beyond the family: "It is not the *medium* that determines school responsibility or authority, it is the *behaviour, and the players involved.*" (Shariff, 2005:471).

The notion of informal consequences (being 'told off' or 'in trouble') directly with the school did arise in discussions in response to Post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"), but were also somewhat vague:

"[Y] 'cause it's to do with the school" [BH7I]

"About someone in school, could be sued or in trouble" [SB8I]

"You'd get told off" [BH8I]

"Saying stuff about a teacher on social media, you'd get in really bad trouble" [BH8I]

"I think you'd get told off for this" [BH12I]

Again, the 'trouble' here is framed primarily as a consequence of posting content that relates directly to the school or a teacher; *this* is seen to be the catalyst for intervention from the school, not the behaviour itself, nor the players involved. While a few students highlighted that the allegations would have to be "checked out" [BH9I], there is little discussion of the school's likelihood to investigate and take action as an authority responsible for pupil safety. The risk, once again, appears to be to do with posting "stuff about a teacher" or "to do with the school", suggestion this is an issue of potential sanctions for undermining the reputation of the institution, rather than anything else (e.g. child protection concerns for a pupil). Once again, the emerging theme is perhaps one of institutional failure, or possibly just irrelevance, when it comes to young people and digital risks (Becker, 1967; Garland, 2000; Greer and McLaughlin, 2016; Purdy and York, 2016; Myers and Cowie, 2017).

c. The Family

Within the traditions of the sociology of deviance, labelling theory and critical criminology, it is essential to pay close attention to how and why certain behaviours become criminalised, and (most importantly) which social groups are driving that change. In the case of cyber-bullying, this is predominantly framed as a parent-led issue, with risks to children being socially amplified by the news media, which tend to focus on the worst-case scenario consequences, such as suicide (Chapter 1). Parents and guardians may occupy a position of 'moral crusaders' or 'moral entrepreneurs', often leading calls for more to be done to protect children from external threats – including online (Savirimuthu, 2012). Becker (1995) and Cohen (1972/2002) stress that those involved in leading calls for more legislation or harsher penalties can often be motivated by noble ideals and humanitarian values (in this case, preventing harm to children). However, pressure for social change can be problematic when driven by high-status groups, with great influence and power, while overlooking lower-status groups most likely to be affected by the change (i.e. young people themselves) (Loseke, 1999; Lobe, Livingstone and Haddon, 2007). Mothers, in particular, are constructed as the primary 'risk managers' for children, second perhaps only to teachers (Jackson and Scott, 1999; Jenkins, 2006; Bailey and

Steeves, 2015; Kyriacou and Zuin, 2016). This construct is further reinforced by media coverage of risks to children, which tend to position mothers as the primary protective force in children's lives (Lee, 2008; Cresci, 2017).

Given cultural constructions of parents as moral crusaders, responsible legal guardians, technologically inept and anxious, as well as sanctioning authorities in the lives of children (see: Chapter 1), it is interesting to note how rarely they were mentioned by young participants in this study. This may be due to a number of factors: Firstly, the school environment and peer discussion workshop structure perhaps makes mention of authoritative parents somewhat taboo (it's never cool to tell your classmates your Mum would tell you off for something posted online). Secondly, it may reflect the perception that parents are unlikely to discover or sanction online transgressions. Online and digital spaces are often constructed as 'away' or 'separate' from parents' familial gaze, something exacerbated by the increase in use of mobile devices and nuanced options for platform privacy settings (Strom et al., 2011; boyd, 2014; Marwick and boyd, 2014a). This may also extend to an assumption on the part of teenagers that parents lack awareness of the social norms of the digital environment, a generational 'knowledge gap', which prevents them exercising any kind of authority on the matter (Livingstone et al, 2011; McAfee 2012; 2014; Ofcom, 2017).

One of the few posts to provoke mention of parents was post B ("I'M SO UPSET I WANT TO DIE…"):

> *"Want to die… [Y] if your parents see [the post]" [SB8B]*

> *"Could be in trouble with your parents. [You could be] sent somewhere where you could get help, special Childline or something" [SB9B]*

Parents were also briefly mentioned in response to implied threats of violence at the school gate (post F) and sharing an indecent video of 'Alice' (post G):

> *"In trouble with your parents or his parents" [BH9F]*

> *"Could be told off by your parents for watching something you shouldn't be" [BH7G]*

These responses suggest that parental consequences stem primarily from child protection concerns, and that being 'in trouble' might simply represent an intervention from parents for safety reasons, and not necessarily anything punitive. In this sense, constructions of parental authority uphold the idea of their primary role as the 'risk manager', protecting children from potential harms (Jackson and Scott, 1999; Lee, 2008). Specific actions of parents as informally sanctioning were not articulated, with the exception of 'being sent for help' in the case of posting about self-harm or suicidal thoughts. This response seems also to echo Jackson and Scott's (1999:94) observation about the increasing authority of the outside expert (in this case 'Childline or something') in parenting decisions: "[Parents] look to 'experts' for a set of rules which, having external authority, may lend a sense of certainty to the decisions parents take". This links to risk theoretically through the notion of the 'ideal citizen', in this case expended to notions of the 'ideal risk-managing parent':

> "The parent is construed as unable to risk-manage effectively without professional "support". Cultural norms ... thus construct the "good/responsible mother" as the mother who is alert to the manifold risks posed to her child(ren) by contemporary society, and considers it her job to manage these risks through reference to expert opinion. (Lee, 2008: 469; Savirimuthu, 2012: 59)

The ideal parent is one who must demonstrate their commitment to being a 'good' parent by seeking external knowledge from child/risk 'experts'. Perhaps the lack of discussion of parental interventions indicates youth perceptions that this is a 'shrinking' authority when it comes to digital and online environments. The concept of 'parental outsourcing' to experts is something that was highly criticised by Canadian police officers who had dealt with youth cyber bullying incidents (Broll and Huey, 2015). Many expressed concerns, or even resentment, that they may be forced to take on cases that parents were unwilling to (or incapable of) handling themselves, acting as "well-paid babysitters":

> "A patrol officer related how he had recently responded to a call for service in which one young girl had decided that she no longer wished to be friends with another young girl, and the first girl's parents wanted the officer to inform the other child about the dissolution of the friendship" (Broll and Huey, 2015: 164-5)

This was primarily framed and discussed as an argument against (further) criminalisation of cyberbullying among young people, but it also sheds some light on

adults' perceptions of parenting vs. policing. Nine out of the twelve police participants in Broll and Huey's (2015) study expressed the view that families should parent their child online by monitoring their activities. It may be that many adults' perceptions are that parents' or teachers' protective responsibilities ought to be 'expanding' into that of a surveillance/monitoring role (Livingstone and Bober, 2003; Shariff, 2005; Hasbrink et al, 2009; Barnard-Wills, 2012). As it happens, advice for parents to "step up surveillance over their children" pre-dates the era when children had mobile access to the Internet, suggesting that the line between parenting and policing has always been somewhat blurred (Kitzinger, 1988: 81).

The consequence of being 'in trouble' or 'told off' was also highlighted by students in response to homophobia, in post E (I'm sick to death of ******ing dykes…") and post H (Peter: You are GAY…"):

> "*Told off. Maybe more than told off, but not orange" [BH12E]*
>
> *"Could be told off" [SB8H]*
>
> *"Would be told off, because you can't just say "you're gay" to someone" [BH10H]*

There is a strong sense of ambiguity and uncertainty in these responses, which suggest negative judgement, without specifically exactly who or what. It may be that 'told off' was an echoed response to my use of the phrase when explaining the 'Yellow' colour category indicating 'social risk' (see: Chapter 2). The telling off could be constructed as coming from adult authority figures, such as parents, relatives or teachers, but it could also be from peers, or perhaps indicate societal moral judgement more generally. "You can't just say you're gay to someone" suggests that students' risk assessments are underpinned by social and cultural norms, in this case with regard to how discussions of sexuality are negotiated (Douglas, 1992; 2002). Whilst violation of a 'boundary' has been identified, the imagined consequences of transgression remain unspecified. The ambiguity and uncertainty of consequences ("maybe more than told off") has perhaps become an accepted dimension of risk perceptions for young people in the digital age (Giddens, 1999; Lee, 2001). This may be exacerbated by the shifting norms and variety of groups within digital spaces themselves: "The sheer complexity of the networks of information flows and the problems of managing risks and uncertainty… [Contributes] to the growing feeling

that the networked society generates risks that cannot be easily managed and controlled" (Savirimuthu, 2012: 39-40).

d. Friends, peers & reputation

"If you have friends who are lesbians, you'd upset them [posting this]" [SB8E]

The notion of peer-policing or emotional sanctions for transgression were emphasised in response to a small handful of posts. In the response highlighted above, the suggestion is that the sender's friends could be upset: Not because the post is threatening and homophobic per se (post E: "I'm sick to death of ******ing dykes…") but because of their friends' sexuality/positionality (being lesbian). In some ways, this seems to reinforce suggestions from previously discussed responses that appear to position targets/victims as responsible for managing consequences, retaliating, or pursuing sanctions against a sender. Similarly, some responses to post H ("Peter: You are GAY…"), suggested that students felt that Peter could 'choose' to be offended or not, or that his reaction would depend on whether he 'was' gay or not (see Chapter 5). This mode of thinking essentially reinforces the idea that homophobia is only a problem for people who identify (openly or not) as LGBT+, rather than framing the issue a social injustice that affects and offends a majority. Even in this case, the imagined response from the sender's 'lesbian friends' is one of them being 'upset', not necessarily exhibiting a punitive emotional response such as anger or disgust. Participants' *own* emotional responses, which did include these, are discussed in Chapter 3.

Dubreil (2010: 39) argues that righteous anger is more likely to be trigged in response to actions against *oneself*, whereas negative actions involving third parties are more likely to result in indignation – a less visceral, 'colder' response. Both reactions are considered to perform a punitive function and relate to violations of what is thought 'ought' to happen in a situation. This notion of punitive emotional responses as a form of informal sanctions are mentioned for the most part by students responding to post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say no…"):

"Wouldn't be in trouble with the police, but lots of people would be angry with you" [SB8C]

"Could get you in trouble. A lot of people would hate you." [SB8C]

"Not threatening someone, but might get into trouble" [BH10C]

"Told off" [BH12C]

"It's against what most people think" [SB13C]

"You shouldn't put something like that on social media" [BH7C]

"*Shouldn't say it*" [BH8C]

The risk here is discussed very clearly in relation to constructs of punitive emotions and notions of what one 'ought' and 'ought not' to do (Dubreil, 2010). Despite this example post also representing one of the most defended examples of 'free speech' or 'just expressing an opinion' (Chapter 5), other responses show that for some students this kind of post was certainly considered risky. 'Anger', or even 'hate', forms part of the imagined negative outcomes of posting statement that contravene 'what most people think'. The perspective is that one 'shouldn't' say this kind of thing, which is slightly qualitatively different to responses by other students that it was inherently a 'bad' opinion. The assessment of risk directly relates to constructions of the *social reaction* to the statement, not the statement itself. In contrast to the homophobic posts just discussed, this post is not necessarily condemned because it might 'upset' or 'anger' rape survivors alone, but 'most people'. This suggests that perceptions of social risk for offensive content could vary depending upon the subject matter, the nature of the post, and whom it is viewed to primarily affect or offend.

Another post that provoked specific discussion of social judgement was post B ("I'M SO UPSET I WANT TO DIE..."):

"Friends might get angry" [SB7B]

"Kind of harming yourself" [SB8B]

"You don't want to say you want to die on social media. Might be embarrassed" [SB13B]

"Saying you want to die is quite bad. You don't want to say that you want to die on social media" [BH10B]

Here, the potential risks are constructed in three different ways: firstly, external emotional/social reaction ("anger"); secondly, internal emotional reaction ("embarrassment" or shame); and finally the possibility of reputational damage to the sender ("kind of harming yourself"). This shows some support for theories of symbolic interactionism and the idea that negative social reactions of others have the ability to negatively impact our constructs of self (Mead, 1918; 1934; Charon 2010). Negative social and emotional responses from others have the potential to transform into internalised shame, guilt or embarrassment on the part of a sender. Lemert (1967: 17) goes as far as to theorise that this process may be so powerful as to not only impact constructs of 'self', but also alter one's behaviour as a result, claiming that "disapproving, degradational and labeling reactions of society" can lead to 'secondary deviance'. Put simply, if one is labelled rude, or naughty, or selfish, one effectively starts to absorb this, and go on to behave in such a way that further reinforces these labels. He argues this may be in part a psychosocial self-defence or preservation strategy, similar to techniques of neturalisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Responses show some support for the idea that there is perhaps a thin line between being 'perceived by others' in a negative light, and then actually 'feeling negative' about oneself.

In response to post B, however, discussions of reputational damage and negative self-image do *not* relate to a social media post that breaks the law, nor is this example particularly offensive or threatening to a specific target/victim. Instead, the post potentially indicates an expression of suicidal feelings or a desire to self-harm. More than any of the other twelve examples, the risk constructed around post B appears almost entirely related to how others interpret, react and respond. Social context is central, as while many students' dismissed the post as clearly 'a joke', others might consider it genuinely concerning - perhaps because of the #Cut4Zayn social media phenomenon (Powell, 2015). While the dominant narrative from news media and organisations like the NSPCC is that social media is *causing* a rise in reports of teen self-harm (see: Brown, 2017; Kirby, 2016; Morley, 2016), others argue online platforms are providing a public space to share (previously 'private') personal pain; essentially allowing for a 'cry for help' to emerge publicly online (Funnell, 2013; Gabriel 2014). Collective public discussion of experiences once considered 'shameful' or 'deviant' (mental health, sexual assault, abuse, divorce, abortion etc.) are

increasingly common online and potentially represent a deliberate challenge from younger people to subvert cultural norms of previous generations about what should be socially 'hidden' vs. 'open' (Ofcom, 2017; boyd and Marwick, 2014a; 2014b). "Self-presentation as a risk-taker" can function to strengthen social relations and collective solidarity, as "someone who appears willing to lose things [e.g. individual reputation] for some [broader social] good is a way of making a claim to moral consideration" (Parker and Stanworth, 2005: 332). It is even argued that risky discourse and practice could symbolise a similar kind of collective solidarity "as Durkheim proposed for God and religious activity", through transcending everyday normality (ibid; see also: Lyng, 1990; Lupton, 1999a).

Despite this, some responses from young participants seem to uphold a more traditional approach to public disclosures relating to self-harm and suicide, claiming these feelings are 'not something you want to say on social media', as the sender risks provoking anger, embarrassment and harm to reputation. Chair of the NSPCC, Peter Wanless, claims social media is contributing to poor mental health among teens partly because of the idea that one's online presence should present an idealised version of the self: ""We know this unhappiness is partly due to the constant pressure they feel, particularly from social media, to have the perfect life or attain a certain image which is often unrealistic" (quoted in Kirby, 2016. See also: Marwick, 2015; Marwick and boyd, 2011). Research by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) also reveals societal pressures, a desire to conform and 'fitting in' were essential considerations of online bloggers when creating their profiles, suggesting that the online environment actually creates further opportunities to 'edit' and perfect the presentation of the self (2013; see also: Goffman 1955; 1990). When faced with pressure to both conform *and* rebel, alongside pressure to simultaneously be 'ideal' yet 'authentic' online, its perhaps unsurprising that some young participants revert to the dominant cultural narrative of 'you don't want to say that on social media' (Gill, 2010; boyd and Marwick, 2011; Gill and Elias, 2014).

Modes of response to risk will be explored further in the Conclusions chapter. This next section will investigate one of the most common perceptions among young participants, which is that of there being 'no consequences' for an imagined sender in response to example online posts.

6.3. Perceptions of no consequences

a. Impunity and ambivalence

Selwyn (2008: 458) notes, "Perceptions of absolute impunity were recurrent throughout the data" during a study with university students into online (mis)behaviour. There are similar results from this study, with almost every one of the twelve posts provoking at least some responses along the lines of a sender 'wouldn't' or 'couldn't' be in any trouble, including for those representing potentially criminal offences. Many participants did not feel that the comments were serious enough to warrant criminal intervention. This was sometimes the case for examples of racism, post A (Gurkhas are filth…") and post J: ("Beyoncé is nothing…"):

> *"Don't think you could be arrested" [SB8A]*
>
> *"You don't get arrested for being racist" [BH13A]*
>
> *"Not like over the top, like stealing something or killing someone" [SB7J]*
>
> *"Not bad enough to be red" [SB7J]*
>
> *"It's being rude and disrespectful, but not a lot to get you into trouble" [SB8J]*

On occasion, there were similar responses to distributing indecent video content (post G: "You gotta watching this video of Alice…") and implied threats/harassment (post F: "Waiting at the gates…"):

> *"Girl could've taken the video herself, so you couldn't go to prison" [BH7G]*
>
> *"Authorities wouldn't take it seriously because it's not explicit" [SB13F]*

These perceptions provide some insight not only into how deviance and criminality is constructed online, but also more broadly, perceptions of policing. Many comments indicated a perspective that police would not take action in response to comments

social media, supporting to some degree Selwyn's (2008) concept of the digital environment being viewed as a 'safe haven' for misbehaviour:

> *"Nothing happens on social media, no one gets into trouble, so many people say bad stuff" [BH8A]*
>
> *"Things like this are said all the time, you can't arrest everyone on the Internet" [BH12A]*
>
> *"Police wouldn't waste their time with it" [SB8C]*
>
> *"There's not much they're going to do about a tweet" [BH13E]*
>
> *"People say that kind of thing a lot and don't get arrested" [BH8E]*
>
> *"Celebrities read mean tweets out all the time and I don't think these people get into trouble" [BH8J]*

Particularly in relation to post J ("Beyoncé is nothing…"), there is some suggestion among student responses that this kind of behaviour would not only go unpunished, but potentially unnoticed or just accepted:

> *"Beyoncé's people [staff] would just ignore it. She gets so many messages a day. She wouldn't read it. If she saw it she might sue, but chances of her seeing it are slim." [BH12J]*
>
> *"She gets a lot of this. Wouldn't bother chasing up" [BH12J]*

Just as consideration of negative consequences are linked to constructions of risk, the perception of an *absence* of any negative consequences (or reduced likelihood of any) are used to justify lower risk ratings for these posts by participants. Student responses imply two distinct, but interlinking, perceptions: Firstly that abusive or offensive online behaviour is so widespread as to be normalised ("people say that kind of thing a lot", "so many people", "a lot of this", "all the time") and/or secondly, that it will be ignored and un-policed ("wouldn't bother", "wouldn't waste time", "nothing happens" etc.) Given this emerging viewpoint, there is some question over whether some young participants perceive these kinds of posts to be 'transgressive'

or ‘deviant’ at all. Two things suggest that they do: Firstly, the use of the yellow (social risk) category being more common than the green (no risk), even when content is seen to provoke ‘no consequences’, and secondly that there are ‘justifications’ for behaviour at all. As discussed in Chapter 5, techniques of neutralisation rely on *acknowledgement* of transgression or deviance, at this is the catalyst for requiring the neutralisation in the first place:

> “Somehow the demands for conformity must be met and answered; they cannot be ignored as part of an alien system of values and norms… Thus the delinquent represents not a radical opposition to law-abiding society but something more like an apologetic failure, often more sinned against than sinning in his own eyes.” (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 666-7)

Here the ‘demand for conformity’ literally manifests as that: ‘everyone does this’. The argument that this conduct is very common, and ‘no-one gets arrested’, represents more than simply a straightforward moral judgement (for example, ‘the sender has done nothing wrong’). Instead, the defence is firmly focused upon the behaviour of *others*, shifting scrutiny away from the actions of the individual sender, and onto the social, cultural, normative context for the behaviour as a justification.

At first, this technique of neutralisation does not appear to fit neatly within any of five originals (‘Denial of Responsibility’, ‘Denial of Injury’, ‘Denial of Victim’, ‘Condemnation of the Condemners’, or ‘Appeal to Higher Loyalties’) (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Rather, it seems to align with what is dubbed a “system of delusions”, in particular the idea that "Everybody else does such things anyway" (Redl and Wineman, 1951: 146, quoted in Maruna and Copes, 2005: 236). A study investigating young people’s perceptions of ‘happy slapping’ (where assaults are filmed and then footage uploaded for people to watch online) found similar lines of defensive arguments from participants, which were linked to a ‘media effects’ theory of violence, or ‘culture as a cause’ argument (Palasinski, 2013; Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos, 2010). The notion of blaming culture, blaming the media, or blaming the proliferation and normalisation of violence more generally can perhaps be viewed as a *merging* of two key techniques of neutralisation: Condemning the Condemners *and* Denial of Responsibility. The claims that online abuse is ‘everywhere’, ‘all the time’ and ‘nothing happens’ is essentially saying: we are products of our society, and society cannot harshly judge and punish the very same behaviour that it simultaneously appears to tolerate.

b. Denial

Cohen (2001; 2008) delves further into conceptualising techniques of 'denial' and categorises three specific types, later adding a fourth:

1. Literal denial e.g. of facts ('that didn't happen')
2. Interpretive denial e.g. of categorisation or class ('that did happen, but it wasn't this')
3. Implicatory denial e.g. of response ('that did happen, but nothing could or should be done about it')
4. Post-moral denial e.g. refusal to care ('that did happen, but so what? /Who cares?')

Participant responses to some of the example posts indicate combinations of interpretative denial (e.g. 'that is racist, but not enough to be criminal'), implicatory denial (e.g. 'that is criminal, but no one will be arrested') and/or post-moral (e.g. 'no one cares'). It feels necessary at this point, as well as discussing techniques of neutralisation and denial, to simultaneously acknowledge the possibility of genuine ignorance with regard to social media law among young people in this study as a factor as well. The lack of human rights, civil and criminal legal education integrated into social media schools initiatives is a serious related issue, discussed in more depth elsewhere (see: Livingstone and Bulger, 2014; Shariff, 2015; Deschamps and McNutt, 2016; Livingstone and Third, 2017; Powell-Jones, 2018). It is potentially likely that some student responses indicate ignorance (as opposed to denial) of criminal, legal and social risks online. However, Lupton (1999; 2013) has critiqued the very notion of 'rational', 'objective' risk knowledge as having an impact on risk behaviour, or even constructs of risk, reminding us that habits and social norms have a far greater influence. Cohen (2001) also stresses how collective 'folk constructions' of risk can override 'scientific' information about risk, with distinctions between what is 'safe' versus 'risky' tending to be on a spectrum, rather than a binary consideration. For these reasons, it becomes less important to try to distinguish between 'types' of risk perception within a (false) dichotomy of 'informed' versus 'ignorant', and focus instead on how and why denial might underpin these perspectives.

c. Post-moral denial and the collective

Cohen (2001) argues Denial of Responsibility is the 'master' technique of neutralisation, useful for avoiding both individual feelings of failure and broader social disapproval. Neutralisation techniques have also been discussed within the context of 'ego psychology', as a form of self-deception in order to help maintain one's sense of self-integrity (irony acknowledged) (Maruna and Copes, 2005: 236). Far from being 'morally manipulative', this process is not always conscious or deliberate, and is even argued to be a 'normal' and 'healthy' mechanism:

> "By protecting one's sense of self as a good person, the excuse maker is more likely to seek to live up to the standards she sets for herself … "Mental health, it turns out, depends not on being in touch with reality, but on illusion, self-deception and denial" (Cohen 2001: 56; Maruna and Copes, 2005: 248)

Just as academics have investigated the positive social potentials of deviance (e.g. Durkheim, 1895/2003), and of risk-taking behaviours (e.g. Lyng, 1990; Lupton, 1999a), it is not surprising that denial is also thought to play an important social and psychological function. As well as preserving individuals' sense of self as a 'good person' and providing a support function for mental health, another potential function of denial is social relations. Post-moral denial is "special" because "it refuses to even play the game of 'we didn't really know what was going on there'" (Cohen and Hussain, 2008: 98). The example given to demonstrate this 'post-moral' state of denial is of American soldiers in Iraq war shooting a group of civilians returning from a wedding, and justifying it simply in terms of 'bad things happen in war'. It's important to note that this attitude towards risk, deviance and denial is a collective one: the denial (like the act itself) is intrinsically linked to the nature of the *group*. Similarly, charity parachute jumpers construct "members' denial of death's likelihood" and through this, a simultaneous "atmosphere of sympathetic unity" and "solidarity" amongst the otherwise strangers (Parker and Stanworth 2005: 331). The argument is that denial and risk-taking can therefore be framed a technique of social bonding, driven by a desire for collectivity in the face of social fragmentation and individualisation in an uncertain, ever-changing world:

> "What 'the social' is understood to be had changed from notions of a mass collectivity to dynamic smaller groupings. We are progressively understanding and acting upon ourselves, not as members of a specific society or though the

ethos of the welfare state, but as self-actualizing individuals, who move between loose and fluid social aggregations, taking up different roles in each" (Lupton, 1999a:100)

d. Post-moral and post-truth denial

Although the two circumstances are very different, the acts of going to war and jumping out of parachute both involve elements of collective denial, essentially a re-construction of the 'reality' or 'truth', in this case towards death. This is where the concept of the 'post-moral' intersects with ideas about 'post-truth'. Giddens (1991) argues risk assessments are part of attempts to 'colonise the future', and so perhaps denial could be theorised as part of attempts to colonise the *past and the present*, by presenting alternative interpretations of events. One of Cohen's (2001) major concerns throughout this work on denial relates to how willing the media and scholars are to frame Holocaust denial as simply an 'alternative perspective', still worthy of consideration. Fraser (2009) also highlights how notions of 'truth' have become so rooted in arguments about subjectivity that some legal courts deliberately *exclude considerations of the historic reality* during trials of Holocaust deniers (quoting from the trials of Ernst Zundel, in Canada, and Fredrick Töben, in Australia):

"*The truth in some absolute sense really plays no role.* Rather, it is the social context in which the message is delivered and heard which will determine the effect that the communication will have on the listener. *It is not the truth or falsity per se* that will evoke the emotion but rather how it is understood by the recipient" (Fraser, 2009: 533 – my emphasis)

"It is not for the court in a case of this kind to seek to determine whether or not the Holocaust occurred . . . The role of the court is to determine whether the applicant has substantiated his complaint that the respondent engaged in conduct rendered unlawful" (2009: 535 – my emphasis)

This epitomises Cohen's concept of 'post-moral' denial, in that it is not representative of literal, interpretative or implicatory denial, but rather an assertion that the truth is somewhat *irrelevant* to the discussion. This has particular relevance to material shared on social media and the concept of 'bullshit': argued to be different from 'truth' and 'lies', bullshit "concerns statements made with little or no concern for their truth-value", to which "there is no sincere and satisfying generally acceptable answer to the

question ‘how do you know?’” (Nielson, 2015: 1). As traditional constructs of validity and credibility diminish, so too does the taken-for-granted authority of ‘expert’ individuals and institutions (decline of defence), replaced with a model whereby trust must be actively constructed *with and by* citizens (Beck, 1992; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Young, 2007; Greer and McLaughlin, 2016). This shift creates room for potential ‘self-styled’ experts to fill the void, with social media enabling individuals to accumulate audiences and disperse ‘bullshit’ with few constraints: “Many actors, some of them powerful, feel impelled to act upon, engage with, and have views on social media, even though they may know little about them.” (Nielson, 2005:2). It is also likely that the structure and design of social media platforms (the quantification of clicks, likes and shares) fuels the so-called ‘attention economy’, essentially incentivising users to post shocking, controversial or inflammatory content (Salter, 2017:61). With this concept in mind, it is perhaps easy to why there is a lack of consensus among young participants as to what constitutes a ‘risk’ online.

‘Truth’ (like ‘risk’) has also shifted from being perceived as a static, objective phenomenon – a form of ‘fixed’ knowledge - to one that is “constantly constructed and negotiated as part of the network of social interaction and the formation of meaning” (Lupton, 1999a:29). The main concern about this is that it potentially leads to a kind of moral and cultural relativism: if we acknowledge and accept multiple ‘truths’ and perspectives as being potentially legitimate, do we open ourselves up to legitimising perspectives that are morally indefensible, such as white male supremacy or Holocaust denial? How do we fit these ‘perspectives’ within the requirements of criminal law? This is particularly difficult to consider when thinking about young offenders on social media:

> “Firmly established aspects of criminal responsibility have… focused primarily on cognitive states: states such as intention, knowledge, belief, foresight and awareness… Admittedly this common-sensicle, subjectivist picture is seriously compromised by the widespread dependence on ‘objective’ tests, referring to what a ‘reasonable man’ (or latterly, ‘person’) would have intended, believed, known and foreseen” (Lacey, 2007: 259)

e. Apathy, denial and deviance: Justifications for intervention?

Denial is generally discussed within a negative framework (highlighted by examples of Holocaust denial and war crimes), but it also involves positive drivers such as

strengthening social relations, preservation of constructs of the self, and good mental health (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Cohen 2001; Parker and Stanworth 2005). Denial is also tricky subject to unpack in relation to notions of criminal behaviour, moral transgression and the potential for rehabilitation. If we consider the social construction of an 'at-risk' person, who also exhibits 'denial' about their 'risky' behaviour, this is often discussed as a 'hindrance' to their 'treatment' or 'progress', and they may be subjected to further inventions and restrictions on liberty (Maruna and Copes, 2005). As Barnard-Wills (2012:251) points out, "The rational actor of liberal governmentality requires *knowledge* with which to reflect upon his or her behaviour *and alter it*" (my emphasis). It is perhaps reassuring to some, but extremely worrying to others, that perpetrators of online abuse may be diagnosed with anti-social personality disorders (see: Bishop, 2013). This kind of serious mental health diagnosis, as a social label, is potentially *more* stigmatising, impactful, longer-lasting and involves more restrictions on liberty than even that of a criminally convicted 'Internet troll'. Gouldner (1968: 107) highlights that the modern concept of the 'deviant' (or 'at-risk'/risky person: see Chapter 1) become "someone who has to be managed, and should be managed better, by a bureaucratic apparatus of official care-takers", leading to what he calls 'normalized repression' (See also: Gouldner, 1971; Gove, 1975).

In the follow up to his book 'The Dark Net' (based on ethnographic research and interviews with so-called 'online trolls'), Jamie Barlett (2017) highlights the potential positive impacts of those who dare to think in opposition to the conventional mainstream in 'Radicals'. He argues that those who challenge existing moral and social orders are a vital part of any healthy and free democracy. And yet, just a few years' earlier, a report he co-authored for DEMOS claims there is a risk to young people using the internet, as they do not know "how to discriminate good, reliable, trustworthy or useful information from the bad" online (Bartlett and Miller, 2011: 3). The solution to the challenges and threats of social media, the report claims, are not in censorship but in cultivating critical thinking skills among the generation of 'digital natives'. This is similar to a more recent report from the 'Truth, Trust and Technology' commission (LSE, 2018), which also placed a focus upon skills-development within schools, whilst at the same time acknowledging:

> "Media literacy is regarded as an easy solution to the spread of misinformation. But it has not been clear who should take the lead nor how best to coordinate and evaluate projects." (LSE, 2018: 6)

Perhaps it is the case that these new forms of communication technology revive and reignite age-old questions, not so much about 'truth', as about power. As Becker (1967: 241) highlights, "in any system of ranked groups, participants take it as given that members of the highest group have the right to define the way things really are". This remains the strongest argument for continuing further social research into the perspectives of young people, and other so-called 'underdogs', as they grow up in a rapidly changing digital landscape. This research has shown that not all young participants engaged in techniques of denial; many actively engaged in a process of 'imagining consequences' for 'others' during discussions, which will be the focus of this next section.

6.4. Ethics and the consideration of consequences for others

The concept of informal social controls as 'managing' behaviour becomes complicated when placed alongside parallel considerations of not just the moral *judgements* of others, but the feelings of others (i.e. emotional impact/ethics). One of the dominant theories of why people exhibit abusive or bullying behaviour, particularly young people and particularly online, is that of so-called 'moral disengagement' (e.g. Bandura et al, 1975; Bandura, 2002; Talwar et al, 2014; Zych, Ortega-Ruiz and Del Rey, 2015; Wegge, Vandebosch, Eggermont, Van Rossem and Walrave, 2016; Cowie and Myers, 2018) It is defined as:

> "Desensitization of prosocial values and emotional empathy towards another person, so that morally disengaged individuals rarely put themselves in the place of the individual being denigrated and, as such, do not reflect on the consequences of their antisocial behaviour for the individual" (Kyriaciou and Zuin, 2016; 35).

Suggested 'solutions' for cyber-bullying therefore often involve strategies to attempt to improve or increase the 'moral engagement' of potential perpetrators and/or bystanders. The concept is connected with theories of techniques of neutralisation, as the moral and emotional 'fallouts', and twinges of conscience, must be neutralised in order for the individual to retain a sense of self as a 'good person' (Skyes and Matza, 1957; Maruna and Copes, 2005). In this final section I aim to highlight the prevalence of students' constructs of responsibility and ethics (consideration of the potential harmful consequences of senders' posts upon others), as a counter-narrative to

previously discussed examples of denial, neutralisation and justifications for online deviance.

a. Harm to subjects/targets

The concept of hurting other people's feelings was raised by many participants, particularly in response to posts that were seen as potentially 'embarrassing' or damaging for the reputation of the subject/target. More often than not, these specifically related to sex and sexuality, such post H ("Peter: You are GAY…"), post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") and post I ("Jenny is a right slag….."):

> ***"**He'd be unhappy if he got that" [BH7H]*
>
> ***"**Embarassing - stuff she doesn't want everyone to see. Lots of people could see it" [SB7G]*
>
> *"[O] or [R] if she didn't want anyone to see it… It's on social media, that's not good" [BH7G]*
>
> *"It's not a nice thing to call people a 'slut'. It's disrespectful and might make her feel bad about herself. Really insecure" [BH7G]*
>
> *"Everyone's going to watch it and its private [BH9G]*
>
> *"The girl could be in trouble too" [BH7I]*
>
> *"Get Jenny into trouble, bad about Jenny" [SB8I]*
>
> *"Could become a self-fulfilling prophecy? ['Slag'?]" [SB13I]*

Young participants' recognition of the potential harmful impact to others of online speech, as well as the risks to the self, seems to support CulturalSymbolic approaches to theorising risk, as the risk is primarily situated within groups and relate to what is considered to breach a social boundary or upset the moral/social order (1986; 1992; 2002). Causing harm – including emotionally - to others is morally, socially and culturally 'taboo': what creates risk and harm to the others is therefore risky for the individual, an act of transgression. In a way, this both contradicts and

supports theories of individualisation and responsibilisation in the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; 1999). Individuals are responsibilised to consider the potential negative outcomes upon others, and adhering to the rules is beneficial for both the group *and the individual.* Adhering to codes of ethical conduct become part of an individualised consideration of risk.

As previously highlighted (Chapter 4), concern for harmful impact upon subjects featured in a post was heavily weighted in favour of the teacher and alleged perpetrator (Mr Sanders) in post I, as opposed to Jenny. Nonetheless, this indicates a perception of responsibility on the part of the sender, and acknowledgment of the potential for negative outcomes for others:

> *"If a jury sees it, it could sway them to not give him [Mr Sanders] a fair trial" [BH10I]*

> *"He could get arrested, people thinking he's a paedophile, and he's like "I'm not". Could ruin his life and lose him his job" [BH12I]*

> *"Risk the teacher could lose his job or she could get into trouble if she's underage" [SB13I]*

> *"It's naming and shaming the girl and the teacher" [BH9I]*

These positions contradicts the old adage of 'Sticks and stones can break my bones, but how can pixels hurt me?' (Cassidy et al, 2009). One of the recommendations from the 2009 study into cyberbullying was that students should be given more opportunities to discuss and share the harmful impacts that cyberbullying had on them openly, essentially raising awareness of the consequences for victims, with the hope of preventing and reducing abuse. Almost as many students who appeared to deny, downplay or disperse responsibility on the part of the sender in response to posts in this study appeared to *acknowledge* responsibility on the part of the sender. This was also the case for 'unforeseen' or 'unintended' negative consequences (such as impacting a trial, or triggering a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' for a girl who was labelled a 'slag').

b. Harm to audiences

Alongside the imagined potential negative consequences considered for those directly targeted or victimised in online posts, another emerging theme was the notion of causing harm to potential audiences of the posts:

> *"Could upset them [I ask 'who?'] People, lesbians, anyone" [SB8E]*

> ***"**Lots of people are gay so it could put lots of people at risk" [BH12E]*

> *"Inappropriate content, young people could just click on it" [BH9G]*

In the case of posts relating to self-harm/suicidal thoughts in post B ("I'M SO UPSET, I WANT TO DIE!...") and potential terror threats in post D ("...@HeathrowAirport…"), the concept of creating *anxiety or worry* was raised:

> *"You'd want to make sure they're alright" [SB13B]*

> *"People might be worried but don't think you'd get into trouble" [BH13B]*

> *"Tagged Heathrow Airport so it would worry people" [BH12D]*

It is perhaps expected that themes would emerge among young people's discussions of risk, although perhaps not to the extent that might be anticipated – particularly given that these might also be constructed as the 'right' or 'correct' responses. Consideration of individual responsibility is not only central to constructs of the 'ideal citizen' in the Risk Society, but also to constructs of adulthood more generally (Beck, 1992). There is an expectation that as part of the process of 'growing up', young people will learn to accept more and more responsibility, something that is also reflected in the differing ages for certain legal rights between 10 and 18 years old in the UK (Muncie, 2014). As such, young people's narratives of ethics and responsibility may also form part of a culturally 'approved' discourse, as well as simultaneously seeking to challenge it. Young people ultimately occupancy a constantly shifting position of opposing social and cultural norms, subject to:

> "Conflicting expectations of protection and expansion, dependence and independence. Their actions are restricted and they are subject to social and

> moral panic for growing up 'too soon', despite the fact that a developmental discourse sanctions this kind of behaviour as part of the path to 'normal' adulthood. They are caught between reason and unreason, childhood and adulthood, belonging to neither side yet maintaining the characteristics of both." (Gabriel, 2014; 107)

Whether these responses represent a cultural discourse of one of individualised responsibility or not, the implication is that young people are not necessarily 'morally disengaged' when it comes to material posted online, with many participants in this study demonstrating an ability to not only imagine consequences for a single sender, but also the wider community who may view the content.

Conclusion

Both the notion of 'unforseen', 'unknowable' or 'unpredictable' consequences, and also that of emotions such as 'anxiety' or 'worry', are central to theories of risk, as well as much of the risk discourse around children and the Internet (Jackson and Scott, 1999; Giddens, 1999; Ungar, 2001; Savirimuthu, 2012). One concern arising from the various findings in this study is that participants' perceptions of potential consequences do not always align with existing laws governing social media. This misconstruction of risk online is particularly problematic in an environment where users may expected to responsibly self-regulate not just their own behaviour, but also judge, intervene with or report problematic behaviour of other users.

Giddens (1991: 8) highlights how the meaning of 'responsibility' has shifted over time, from notions of "causality and agency", to "ethics" and accountability, and then further still to that of "obligation, or liability". Participants in this study demonstrated a variety of different perspectives on what the consequences might be for the same group of online postings, with the most striking finding perhaps being the diversity/lack of consensus. The central question now, therefore, is whether ignorance or denial of any potential future consequences of posting content online actually serves to absolve individuals of responsibility/liability for said outcomes. While some have argued that features of the internet, such as 'online disinhibition' (Suler, 2004) encourage deviant behaviour online, it is also true that the "trend towards identifiability on social media has not proven particularly inhibiting" either (Salter, 2017; 59). There is no need to hide one's identity, nor to 'neutralise' negative emotions, such as blame or shame, if the behaviour is not considered deviant at all (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

Governmentality, Risk Society and Cultural/Symbolic approaches to theorising risk all place significant value on the theme of 'knowledge', but for different reasons; what this chapter has attempted to explore is how - despite the variation in differing perspectives among participants on the 'imagined consequences' - these are all reliant upon different forms of social-cultural 'knowledge'. For some, that means sources such as news media and real-life case studies, for others, lived experiences online where they witness abusive content 'all the time', 'everywhere', with 'nothing happening' in response. For some, there is concern and empathy towards imagined subjects/targets, while for others, culturally inherited discourses about individual responsibility mean that victims may be expected to actively pursue offenders through the civil courts, rather than rely on any police, school or state intervention. While proposed solutions to real or perceived 'risks' to young people using the Internet seem to primarily emphasise the need for critical thinking and media literacy education, Becker (1967) reminds us that 'hierarchies of credibility' need to be a central consideration for the future: It is not so much *what* we want to teach children, but *who decides* that matters most.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Summary of key findings:

The purpose of this research was to investigate how young people perceive, interpret and construct 'risk', as well as responsibility, in relation to publishing content online, for example via social media platforms. While online risks to children and young people is a somewhat crowded area of empirical study, this thesis has provided a unique contribution through positioning young people as the primary social audience of behaviour, focusing constructs of risk around an imagined sender (producing/publishing online content), utilising innovative methodology that combines focus groups, stimuli examples, categorisation and ethnography, and finally by situating findings within existing legal frameworks, as well as theoretical frameworks of risk and deviance as social constructed. This concluding chapter will summarise the main findings, specifically, what has been learned about the ways perceptions of risk vary among young participants for different example posts, and provide an overview of the key risk themes, concepts and theories appearing to underpin those perceptions. Findings will be discussed within the theoretical framework of risk as a social construct using an interactionist approach, linking to sociological theories of risk and deviance to explore how risk may be perceived (or not) by young participants, and why. In addition, and where relevant, research-led policy implications will be discussed across the fields of education, law, technology and policing, in order to maximise the potential impact beyond the realms of academia.

Risk perceptions differ between older and younger age groups

Responses from participants were initially quantified by noting the number of times each of the four risk categories was mentioned within a group when discussing the 'riskiness' of each post. Results show older students (aged 16-18) are more likely to rate posts as lower risk than younger students. Green allocations (signifying 'no risk') were highest amongst this older age group, and the Yellow category (purely 'social risk') was the most used category among this group overall. Students who were the youngest (aged 11-12) by contrast were the *most* likely to rate content as high risk (Red: 'criminal risk' category), while the older students were the least likely to do so. This leads to the conclusion that younger students may have higher perceptions of risk online, potentially decreasing as students get older (or at least the *expression* of these perceptions among a peer group would diminish as students aged).

These findings seem to contradict other empirical studies into perspectives of risk, which suggest people become *more* risk aware/averse as they age (e.g. Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). Within the fields of psychology and neuroscience, it has been claimed that teenage brains are somewhat 'hard-wired' for impulsivity and risk taking (Steinberg, 2010; Mounts et al. 2015). However, an interactionist approach would argue that social interactions and experiences also likely contribute to risk judgements. Similarly, some criminological approaches argue that deviance is essentially 'learned' behaviour (Becker, 1963), as are the techniques of neutralization used to justify it (Sykes and Matza, 1958). When these results are considered in conjunction with the qualitative data, it can be argued that students' experiences and interactions likely underpin changing perceptions of risk as they age. This includes their experiences online *and* offline, as one cannot separate young people's risk judgments from the social environments in which they occur (Pilkington, 2007).

This research also highlights how acceptance and normalization of abusive, homophobic and racist content online may be learned, along with techniques to defend and neutralise it, as children get older. Among the older students, there was only one mention of a potential criminal risk for post E ("I'm sick to death of dykes…") and none for post H ("Peter: you are gay…"). Post A ("Gurkha are filth…") was categorized as being a purely 'social risk' (Yellow) a total of three times overall in this study, and every time by sixth formers aged 16+. While younger students tended to express a more simplified perspective on ethics (with negative moral judgments generally aligning with higher risk ratings), older students tended to separate their affective or moralised response from what they viewed as realistic judgment of likely consequences. This suggests older students may come to view abusive and discriminatory content as *less* risky as they get older due to *more* experience of the online world, where it is widespread and tolerated to the point of normalisation (Bailey and Steeves, 2015; Salter, 2017).

If older students have potentially experienced or witnessed what they feel to be a *lack* of social reaction to this kind of content online, this may contribute to perceptions of impunity and judgments of 'low risk' for those who post it. This also provides support for the claim that online spaces essentially uphold and reproduce existing social inequalities, rather than challenge them (Cesroni et al, 2012). It could be that young people learn through experience that social media remains a relatively 'safe space' for certain views to be expressed, but not others. It is essentially *'riskier'* to be an outspoken feminist, or a black, disabled or LGBTQ+ rights activist online, than it is to

be openly sexist, racist or homophobic (Jane, 2014; Salter, 2017). These findings suggest we need to prioritise the inclusion of counter-narratives to any normalisation of discrimination and abuse, both within educational and online environments (Ditch the Label, 2015). Adults must be wary not to conflate underlying social issues (such as prejudice) with the platforms through which they are expressed (i.e. technological devices themselves) when it comes to thinking about how, where and why these digital 'risks' affect young people. There also needs to be greater acknowledgement from government and technology companies that while these platforms do not *create* the social attitudes that plague them, the perceived 'tolerance' of toxicity within digital social spaces has the potential to exacerbate these problems for future generations.

Consensus and diversity among students' perceptions of risk

The example that was generally the most likely to be rated as criminally risky among participants, with the strongest consensus and 'leaning' towards higher risk categories, was post D ("@Heathrow airport…. BOOM!"). Participants used the word 'threat' 11 times and 'terrorism' seven times, across seven different groups when describing the risk. Every single group that discussed this example mentioned either one or both of these terms in their responses, and the qualitative data shows there was fairly little debate about the level of risk. It was one of the few examples where defence arguments such as 'humour' or 'free speech' were *not* viewed as a legitimate factor to potentially reduce the risk to the sender. Equally, unlike other examples, the ambiguous nature of this post (potential for multiple interpretations) was acknowledged, but again did not generally lower the risk allocated given by participants. Student responses indicate a perception that there are some types of content that are so criminally risky, the sender intention or 'meaning' becomes almost irrelevant to the level of risk.

Existing case law (e.g. Paul Chambers' case, see: Bowcott, 2012) indicates a conviction for this kind of post is unlikely to be upheld by the courts, yet the general perception among students is that criminal consequences are somewhat *inevitable* for a post that could be interpreted as a bomb threat at an airport. The risk of being convicted for this kind of behaviour may be socially amplified by the high profile media coverage of Chambers' case (Kasperson and Kasperson, 2005). It could also be that young people perceive terrorism as a crime guaranteed to be taken seriously by police, compared with other crimes that are perhaps more 'tolerated' (e.g. online threats, hate speech, revenge porn). Responses could more broadly indicate perceptions of the role and priorities of the police service within contemporary society

(i.e. focused primarily on counter-terror). It is useful here to highlight the social, cultural and political context for this research at the time of writing is one where the threat to U.K. from international terrorism is 'Severe', meaning a terror attack is 'highly likely'[17], and this no doubt impacts youth perceptions of the risk of tweeting a joke bomb threat, too.

There is an interesting challenge for educators here, especially in relation to law and policing. Accurate and fair education on the legal risks would need to highlight that Chambers was *cleared* of sending a menacing communication. Yet, this in itself could result in more problems for police if young people were told this kind of post is not breaking the law, as potentially this could be viewed as licence to imitate without fear of repercussion. It is arguably beneficial for law enforcement for this overly inflated risk perception to remain unchallenged; if citizens perceive the risk of arrest to be very high for jokes about bombs, they may be more likely to self-regulate their online behaviour to manage that perceived risk (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996). There is symbolic value in proceeding with public prosecutions for social media offences as part of an attempt deter others from unwanted behaviour, whether it be making jokes about terrorism, or training a pug to perform Nazi salutes online (BBC News, April 2018). It is vital, therefore, that a critical approach to studying law and criminology is integrated into school discussions of online risk, so that young people are not afflicted by an inflated or disproportionate perception of risk, which could lead to self-censorship (Rowbottom, 2012). Education on crime, law and ethics needs to include discussion of citizen's *rights and freedoms* (including to 'vent', offend and joke) online, as well as users' risks and responsibilities (Powell-Jones, 2018). This is one reason why it is perhaps preferable for social media legal education to be led by an authority *separate from* (or in addition to) police, CEOP, the CPS and even technology companies, who have a vested interested in encouraging users to self-manage in a way that minimises the need for their intervention.

The example that provoked the least consensus in terms of risk categorization was post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…"), with a total of 50 different ratings given across all four risk categories, by a total of nine groups. The next most debated example, with 42 ratings mentioned was post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"). Post G was intended to represent the spreading of sexual video content, potentially of a young person, while Post I was intended to represent the identification of a potential child

[17] Source: MI5 The Security Service: https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels

sex victim. As previously highlighted, this confusion and disagreement was a surprising finding for these examples, especially considering the extensive work in schools over recent years focusing primarily on online child protection risks to children (Barnard-Wills, 2012; Savirimuthu, 2012; Byron, 2008). With prior knowledge of the work of organisation such as CEOP in schools, I (incorrectly) assumed that these particular posts would likely be identified and categorized as predominantly Red ('criminal risk') with little debate or disagreement. These findings demonstrate that more work is clearly needed in this area, and that current intervention programmes are potentially ineffective at conveying the primary 'child protection' messages.

It's possible that some educational programmes may inadvertently have the opposite effect to that intended: Creating a narrative of child-blame, rather than child-protection. Participants raised questions about child complicity and culpability, which (when one considers the focus on risk management narratives for children - mostly girls - online) may be a result of implicit victim responsibilisation for image-based sexual abuse, and sexual abuse more generally. This also supported by the qualitative data: most of the factors considered as influencing the 'riskiness' of post G centred on scrutiny of Alice's past behaviour. Similarly, responses to post I indicate a primary concern for the reputation of the *teacher*, combined with an assumption that the allegations were false. These findings provide support for Salter's argument that girls remain positioned as gatekeepers, responsibilised for managing the risks of (digital) sexual offending, and the social shame that accompanies it (2017; See also: Powell and Henry, 2014; Henry and Powell, 2014; Ringrose et al, 2012; Barnard-Wills, 2012). In this context, students' consideration of the risk to the sender seem to uphold, rather than subvert, existing social norms - particularly those relating to power, sexuality and gender.

Discussion about the extent of girls' responsibility in Posts G and I represent both 'Denial of the Victim' (if the victim is responsible for their victimization, they are potentially deserving of it too) and 'Denial of Responsibility' (if the victim is somehow more responsible, the sender is therefore less so) (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The focus on the behaviour of the victims, in the past, allows the focus to shift *away* from the actions of the sender, in the present, in a way subverting the very task presented to participants. The implication is that perceived victim responsibility absolves a certain level of responsibility elsewhere, e.g. for the sender of an online post. In this way, blame/responsibility is constructed as something singular, and limited, rather than multiple, shared and ongoing. Beck (2015) highlights a sign aimed at drivers in

Munich asserting that they are not *in* a traffic jam, they *are* the traffic jam, which raises the notion of how to raise awareness of responsibility for problems to which we all collectively contribute on a small scale. When it comes to social and cultural problems – be that gender inequalities, toxic masculinity or the continuum of sexual violence - the idea that it is *all* of our responsibility to address seems a difficult thing to conceptualize. Constructs of responsibility, blame and risk will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In essence, uncertainty of the risk seems to stem from an uncertain narrative of blame and responsibility. Until we align dominant rhetoric to one that is unambiguous – namely that a victim is never to blame for their victimisation (with added emphasis in the case of child sex victims) – across the media, the criminal justice system, law enforcement and the education system, the child protection aspects of digital literacy may remain ineffective at actually helping to protect children. Equally, expanding the conversation beyond a simplified balance of blame between 'victim' and 'offender' to acknowledge how media and culture – something we are all complicit in - impact constructs of gender and sexual relationships ought to be part of the newly compulsory sex and relationships curriculum in schools (Ringrose et al, 2012; Karaian, 2013; Gabriel, 2014). Above all, this unique opportunity to support the development of young people's understanding of gender, consent, sexuality, relationships and power must not be hindered by squeamish and conservative attitudes towards discussing sex with children under the guise of 'protecting their innocence' (Kitzinger, 1988 Jackson and Scott, 1999; Derbyshire, 2007).

Language, labelling, and legal terminology and awareness

The research also focused on how and when particular labels might be applied by young people (as the 'social audience') to certain types of online behaviour (Becker, 1963). Terms implying moral judgment ('offensive' 'bad' 'out of order' 'rude' 'insulting' 'inappropriate') were far more common than specific legal or criminal terminology ('hate speech' 'threatening' 'racist' etc.). Neither the term 'abuse' nor 'harassment' were used by *any* of the participants to describe *any* of the posts, which is surprising given that these are very common terms within the literature (and law) to describe unwanted or upsetting behaviours online. The findings suggest the emotional, moral and social reaction is primarily what underpins initial labelling processes, rather than academic or 'rational' risk knowledge – although this is a somewhat false dichotomy (Lupton, 2013). Students' non-verbal reactions (e.g. gasping, laughing etc.) also indicate that the initial response to a 'risky' online post is rooted in emotion, such as

shock, or, at least, the posts prompted a social performance of this among peers. It may be useful for adults who work with children to ensure use of correct legal terminology to describe behaviours (e.g. harassment, abuse, threatening, homophobic, etc.) for two reasons. Firstly, it could potentially help young people to recognise when online behaviour potentially becomes a criminal matter, and therefore encourage reporting, or seeking support. Secondly, it may encourage adults to avoid potentially 'minimising' or downplaying the seriousness of interpersonal offending among young people (Cowie and Myers, 2018).

Students showed some familiarity with legal and criminal terminology through awareness and discussion of issues such as suicide, blackmail, slander, and even contempt of court (one student inferred a risk of affecting someone's right to a 'fair trial'). This was a somewhat unexpected finding, although may be accounted for by previous workshops within the school (see Chapter Two: Sampling). What particularly stood out was students' discussion of rape, sexual offending and paedophilia, as well as issues such as consent, implying clear awareness among at least some of the students, even younger year groups. Example C ("If a girl's too drunk to say no…") mentioned 'rape', but no students asked for clarification of what this meant, whereas at other times when an unfamiliar term was used, they did (for example, 'Gurkha' and 'dyke'.) Equally, when posts such as I ("Jenny is a right slag…") and F ("Waiting at the gates for my little friend…") prompted student-led discussion of paedophilia and sexual abuse, none of the students indicated that they were unaware of what this meant. One participant even cited the risk of police arrest due to 'Operation Yewtree' (the Met Police inquiry into allegations of child sexual abuse, prompted by the offences of Jimmy Saville), suggesting that youth awareness of criminal sexual offending may be greater than adults assume.

While it is possible that some students were unfamiliar with these issues and too embarrassed to ask, this study indicates most were comfortable engaging with the topic and vocabulary surrounding sexual crime. This is particularly interesting given that the 'risks' to children using social media and the Internet are often framed as concerns about "obscene language, sexual talk" and a desire to protect children from exposure to this (Wolak et al, 2008; Ybarra et al. 2008; Harvard, 2008). This ultimately reinforces the notion of 'knowledge', particularly in relation to issues like rape and sexual abuse, as being harmful for children, as Kitzinger articulates, "in the name of 'childhood innocence' adults repress children's own expressions of sexuality, deny them control over their own bodies and 'protect' them from knowledge" (1988:

80). This research supports the argument that children are not only 'knowledgeable' about these issues regardless, but adds that many are comfortable – even confident – to bring them up and discuss them as part of a focus group setup in schools. I would go as far as to question whether it is perhaps primarily *adults* who feel uncomfortable and ill-equipped to discuss these matters with young people, and that the repression of this topic is typical of a 'risk management' approach taken by many schools: Ignorance is an excuse for inaction. As such, we must ensure that sex and relationships education, as well as public legal education and digital/media literacy education, incorporate adequate opportunities for children to raise and discuss the topic of sexual offending.

Students' use of legal terminology may also be part of attempts to self-'adultify'; a language tool used to legitimize individual perspectives on risk among a social group. This demonstration of 'knowledge' about risk through subject-specific terminology perhaps increases the chances that the group will accept or support their perspectives. This can be theorized in relation to constructs of the 'ideal citizen' (read: ideal *adult*) "who has developed the capacities of self-reflection, self-regulation and self-government" based on expert knowledge (Kelly, 2003: 176). In addition, quotes reveal how some students appear to distinguish between moral and legal transgressions; the same example may at once be 'really bad', but also 'nothing criminal, nothing illegal'. This was more common among older (16+) students, suggesting that their 'knowledge' represents more of a critical criminology perspective: legal or criminal sanctions in response to online behaviour are recognised as distinct from moral, social and cultural attitudes. This too, may be a result of socially learned behaviour. Labelling theory asserts certain transgressive or 'rule-breaking' behaviours may be considered deviant and sanctioned, while others may not, depending on the social *reaction* (Taylor et al 1973). As children age, they may learn that not all 'bad' behaviour is likely to be sanctioned. Inclusion of critical legal studies/criminology as part of the PSHE curriculum would allow young people the opportunity to discuss and debate these ideas further within an educational setting. This in turn could lead to greater understanding of young people's perspectives on the law, criminal sanctions and law-breaking, with possibilities for improvements within the Youth Justice sector.

Labelling prejudice, discrimination and hate

Labels of 'racist' and 'homophobic' were applied to certain content, although not unanimously. Racism was mentioned eight times across all the groups in relation to

both post A ("Gurkhas are filth…") and post J ("Beyonce is nothing but an ugly black slut…"). While many students were unaware of the term 'Gurkha', almost all made a connection once their nationality was explained. No students requested a definition of racism, suggesting the concept is likely well understood. At other times, students used similar terms such as 'discrimination' 'stereotyping' 'generalising' etc., in order to criticize posts. 'Homophobia', as a term or label, was used less frequently: just six times in response to post E ("I'm sick to death of dykes…") and only four times for post H ("Peter, you are gay…"). Whether content was considered homophobic or not prompted more debate within the groups than the racist posts, which may indicate wider acceptance or tolerance of homophobic sentiment, or simply uncertainty around what kind of language is (or is not) acceptable to use among peers[18]. Equally, while racist posts A and J were allocated 17 'criminal' categorisations and just 8 that were purely 'social' risk, homophobic posts E and H were allocated 15 'criminal' categories, but 24 'social risk' allocations, suggesting that racist content may be viewed as more *criminally* risky, whereas homophobia is generally perceived as more of a 'social risk'. This perhaps reflects the wider context for this research, as the threshold for prosecution of homophobic speech is higher than that for racist speech.

Labels of 'sexist' or 'misogynistic' were not used at all by any students, despite four potential examples with this kind of sentiment. One exception was a Year 7 pupil who questioned whether post C ("I'm sorry, but if a girl's too drunk to say no…") was 'homophobic', and was corrected by her teacher *("Do you mean sexist? Against women?*") This 'lack' of data can arguably be considered a finding in the sense that students clearly do not undergo the same labelling process (whether as a moral judgement or a purely legal description) to posts emphasising gender-based abuse in the same manner or with the same frequency as abuse on the grounds of nationality, ethnicity or sexuality. This may be a vocabulary issue (the terminology is unfamiliar), but may also indicate a potential level of tolerance/acceptability that is higher. Sexist and misogynistic language, content and sentiment is widespread online and often used to keep women 'out' of public digital spaces (Cockburn, 2004; Coleman, 2014; Jane, 2014; Salter, 2017). For this reason, it is potentially familiar, rather than unusual, which may explain the reason it has *not* been labelled: it represents a 'norm' rather than something deviant. Symbolic violence against women and girls potentially doesn't even have a label in the minds of many students, lacking a *name* to actually

[18] For further discussion of young people's use of homophobic language in everyday life, see: Laylor and Rendle-Short (2008) and Woodford et al (2012)

call this kind of behaviour[19]. This is yet another argument for why gender-related discussions must be included in PSHE curricula, in relation to sex, relationships, consent, crime, media, culture, prejudice, human rights and digital literacy.

In many ways, the construction of risk in relation to prejudice actually mimics English laws surrounding hateful material published or distributed online: the threshold for prosecution for material inciting racial hatred is lower than that for hatred on the grounds of sexuality (which must include a threatening element to be criminal), and currently there is no national legal framework for inciting hatred on the grounds of *gender*. Whether this is an example of general prejudice moving 'into' formal law-making, or prejudices in law filtering 'outwards' into public consciousness, there is doubtless a symbiotic relationship here. Ensuring that victims of gender-based and sexualised violence and threats, including digitally-enabled offences, are given adequate legal protections may therefore contribute to a shift in perceptions of risk and acceptability of misogynistic and sexist behaviours. That being said, it may make things worse. Even feminist legal reform presents potential problems for women, due to the 'autonomy paradigm' discussed in more detail later in this chapter, which asserts – conversely - that calls for greater legal protections for women contribute to perceptions of weakness, and therefore undermine the fight for gender equality (Nielsen, 2000).

Ambiguity, subjectivity and safety

Uncertainty in terms of the meaning of a message was generally perceived by students to reduce the riskiness of a post. Students were clearly able to distinguish between what they felt was explicit, clear and obvious (particularly in terms of threats), and what was more ambiguous. The group discussions highlighted the importance of sender intentions, and how these might contradict what a target or audience of a post might interpret the meaning to be. Whereas most risk theories argue that uncertainty *exacerbates* risk anxieties (Beck 1992; Austen, 2009), this study shows the opposite can also be true: unknowns or uncertainties actually provide opportunity for disgreeement, and therefore 'safety'. This is related to the concept of 'plausible deniability', where a lack of explicit clarity allows for someone under scrutiny to provide an alternative narrative to the one assumed by a social audience. This adds weight to theories of plausible deniability as a specific risk-management strategy, which has been highlighted by previous research into young

[19] Part of the rationale behind Laura Bates' 'Everyday Sexism Project'. See: https://everydaysexism.com/

people's 'sub-tweeting' and 'sexting' practices (Marwick and boyd, 2014; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). Ambiguity and uncertainty within messages are therefore perceived to be 'safer', because they allow a sender to claim 'innocence' or 'ignorance' of any negative impact upon a subject or audience. The fact that ambiguity, and a sender's claimed intention, may *not* constitute a legitimate defence in legal terms for menacing or threatening content indicates a need for greater public legal education around digital offending. Some social media enabled offences rely on the 'likelihood' or 'probability' of negative impact for a charge to be brought against a sender, while for others charges can be brought simply for 'reckless' publishing (CPS, 2018).

Students frequently discussed the concept of subjective interpretations of a post, at times questioning whether the content of a post was 'serious' or 'real', or not. This echoes results from previous studies revealing how young people argue hyped up 'drama' online can be performative (Marwick and boyd, 2014). This may also represent the 'Denial of Injury' technique of neutralisation: If the meaning or intention 'isn't serious', then any harm caused must also *not* be serious (Sykes and Matza, 1957). These discussions also bring into consideration the concept of 'claims-making', as there is social power in being able to put forward and defend one's own perspective when competing claims are vying for legitimacy (Loseke, 1999; Ungar 2001). What is uncertain however, is students' perceptions of 'who decides' the meaning or seriousness of a post when there are competing claims at play, for example between a sender and a subject, or a victim and offender. This is something that could be further explored with future research. Based on this study, it seems that those who are victimized online may at times be expected to have to work hard to counter claims being made by a sender (or others) that a post is *not* victimizing, even if they feel they have been genuinely harmed/injured. This suggests that a conflict of power ensues beyond the initial act of victimisation between an accused and an accuser, each fighting for *their* labelling of the behaviour to be accepted, whether within a literal court of law, or a court of public opinion among peers[20] (Becker, 1963). This in itself seems to mimic the binary, oppositional and adversarial set up of the English justice system (prosecution versus defence), as opposed to alternative models, such as the inquisitorial system. Equally, within media and politics, the setup of binary and oppositional viewpoints is a common technique for public discourse, perhaps contributing to the notion that conflicting perspectives leads to individuals having to 'fight it out' and 'win' (Menkel-Meadow, 1996).

[20] A recent example is how the #MeToo movement has evoked conflict over diverging definitions of 'sexual harassment' argued out within the public sphere of news media (Economist, 2017).

Approaches to interpreting meaning varied among student participants, as did their certainty when ascribing and articulating meaning. Some acknowledged meaning as something definitive and specific ('it means this'), at other times ambiguity was recognized and highlighted ('it could mean that' or 'might be this'). At other times, students actively suggested meaning could be contradictory ('it says this, but doesn't mean it') or completely elusive ('we don't know what it means'). There is a clear diversity of certainty ascribing meaning to a post among the groups of young people. On the one hand, students' attempts to assert their certainty or 'knowledge' of the meaning of a post may be part of a coping strategy for dealing with risk and uncertainty, particularly if the 'ideal citizen' is one who is 'knowledgeable' about risk (Parker and Stanworth, 2005; Beck, 1992). In this context, certainty of knowledge about the meaning of a message potentially makes it easier to construct a definitive risk judgement, and neutralise any associated anxiety. That being said, those students who *acknowledged* elusively, contradiction or uncertainty meaning arguably also recreate a dominant (adult) narratives on risk (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This is partly because recognising complexity and subjectivity is often viewed as a sign of emotional and intellectual 'maturity', something that young people and children tend to be scrutinised for signs of, as they age (Burnuz-Burneitez and Dumortier, 2018).

Proximity between sender and subject

A common theme among students' risk assessments of the posts was the issue of directly tagging, targeting or identifying a subject in the message, which was perceived as potentially increasing the risk. Posting 'about' someone, in a general sense, was not the same as saying something 'at' someone or 'to' them. The most straightforward argument for why this might be, as previously mentioned, is the concept of 'plausible deniability', which is available as a defence to senders who are deliberately inexplicit when it comes to digital content (Marwick and boyd, 2014; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). There is also a sense of the idea that if a victim is unaware of comments made about them, there is potentially room for 'Denial of Injury' (Sykes and Matza, 1957), in other words, the assumption that 'what you don't know can't hurt you'. Some student discussion around risk relates to the notion of a 'retribution-seeking victim' and assessing their capability to actively pursue and punish a sender. A sender who does not 'tag', name or direct their message towards the subject is seen as minimising the risk of retaliation by doing so. Using a symbolic/cultural analysis of risk, one could also argue that by avoiding directly addressing a subject in

a message, they are kept 'out' of the social interaction, reinforcing a symbolic boundary and increasing a sense of 'othering' towards a subject (Douglas, 1992). This reduces the perception of risk: it is far less risky to post derogatory content about one of 'them', than one of 'us'.

This point is further reinforced by the fact that social, emotional and cultural differences or symbolic 'distance' between a sender and subject were sometimes viewed as aggravating risk (e.g. post G: "Alice"), while at other times, viewed as mitigating it (e.g. post J: "Beyonce"). This can be explained in terms of the concept of 'insider/outsider' and 'self/others' dichotomies. When a subject or target is symbolically 'closer', for example within the same group of peers, the sender may have more tacit social knowledge to be able to effectively assess the boundaries of acceptable behaviour ('*between friends'*). In this sense, they are able to make a more informed judgement of whether the behaviour is likely to provoke harm or retaliation, making it socially 'safer' than directing content towards a stranger. At the same time, potentially negative social reaction and peer judgement could be viewed as a 'higher stakes' risk to take, when compared with directing messages at a total stranger, as it has more potential to damage a sender's *status* if they are judged to have violated a social code among a group (Douglas, 2002; Lupton, 1999a/2013). One is likely to better 'know' the risks of targeting someone closer to home, but the consequences, if a social or moral boundary is misjudged, are potentially much more significant.

Social hierarchies of senders and subjects

Power and social status are hugely important to young people's construction of risk. In particular, this is highlighted by responses to post I ("Jenny is a right slag…") where the posts makes allegations about a male, adult teacher having a sexual relationship a female student, who could reasonably be assumed to be a classmate of the sender. Primarily the harm, and therefore risk, was considered in relation to the teacher. Even when students acknowledged the potential for the allegations to be true, and the conduct of the teacher to be problematic/criminal, there was a sense of disclosure being viewed as risky *regardless*. Instead of highlighting how the allegations might be raised more appropriately, student discussions focused upon potential culpability of Jenny, potential harm to the teacher/school and likelihood of the allegations to be false. This is hardly surprising, as doubt over reliability of allegations plus fear of damaging alleged abusers' reputation are common techniques of neutralisation for the non-disclosure of child abuse more generally in society (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013). In this context, the additional assumed power imbalance between the alleged

victim and sender/witness (likely to be school pupils) and alleged offender (an adult and teacher) no doubt exacerbate the perception of 'riskiness' of raising the allegations, especially in such a public forum. This provides another example of why and how current digital awareness projects in school may be failing to adequately protect children. As has often been the case, risky adults continue to be constructed as 'dangerous strangers' – including online - focusing the attention away from the very real potential for digitally-enabled disclosures far closer to home, and how young people ought to respond to these if they surface (Lupton, 2013; Savirimuthu, 2012; Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001; Jackson and Scott, 1999).

Similarly, in case of post J ("Beyonce is nothing but…"), students were quick to discuss the subject/target's powerful status in relation to their constructs of risk. On the one hand, it was argued that she 'wouldn't notice' or 'care' about abusive messages, suggesting an inability on the part of a sender to cause harm to a high-status target (therefore lowering the risk). On the other hand, her high-status position was argued to mean that she was better equipped to retaliate and respond to the abuse, whether that meant pursuing prosecution or suing for reputational harm (therefore raising the risk). Either way, these constructs are built upon *reinforcing* the sender as low status and the target as high status, effectively constituting a 'Denial of Victim' for someone with fame and wealth (Sykes and Matza, 1957). This also sheds light on how power and status is constructed with adults in positions of power in a more abstract, distanced sense (celebrities) versus adults who occupy positions of power in the everyday lives of children (e.g. a teacher), with the latter more risky because it is literally and metaphorically 'closer'. Young participants' assessments of risk tend to combine considerations of social proximity and hierarchy between a sender and a subject, another reason why the 'scenario/vignette' method as an educational tool within digital citizenship classes is so useful when discussing legal and ethical boundaries of acceptability. In addition, the use of role-play and vignette methods remain a vital tool for researchers looking to develop their understanding of the complexities of young people's perspectives as part of social research.

Risk perceptions of speech versus action

'Just saying' was one of the most common responses recorded from students' discussions of risk. Similarly, the notion of 'not doing' or 'not having done' anything frequently emerged, especially in relation to threats, implying students' perceive 'saying' and 'doing' as being distinct, if not dichotomous. Risk categorisations were generally raised to higher levels when the 'words' in a post were linked with 'actions',

either in the past or the future. At times it was unclear whether it was *solely the posting of the message* that was being judged in terms of risk, or the perceived accompanying 'action' of a sender, too. For example, some students felt that post C ("I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk…") was an admission of previously having committed rape, or a stated intention to do so in the future, and therefore categorised it as 'criminal' on this basis. This made it difficult to ascertain accurate assessments of students' perception of risk 'purely' in relation to the posting of a message, which is both a critique and a reality of 'messy' qualitative research with young people (Cowie et al, 2014). However, what the discussions do reveal is that some students clearly perceive words and action - or potentially online and offline expressions – as being distinct in terms of the criminal and legal risks.

To some extent, this 'just saying' defence can be conceptualised as 'Justification by Comparison' technique of neutralisation (Maruna and Copes, 2005), but more broadly there is a sense of denial in terms of speech or publishing being an *act* at all (Austin, 1962). Participants constructed words as less risky than acts, or at least less likely to be *criminally* risky. It could be also be argued that this dichotomous thinking, demonstrated through constructing words and actions in opposition to each other, may also be part of attempts to simplify (and therefore more easily manage) the complex realities of risk (Lupton and Tullock, 2003; Parker and Stanworth, 2005). Where the risks involved in a decision are unknown or unknowable, the coping mechanism may be to divert to 'black-and-white' simplified thinking and reliance on what *is* known: paradigms such as 'offline is different to online', 'words are different to actions' etc. Students' uncertainty or lack of 'knowledge' about whether comments supporting rape online are criminal or not, is perhaps what encourages a psychological fall back onto what they do know (i.e. the *act* of rape is criminal) and this forms a more stable foundation on which to structure and build their risk judgements.

Risk and constructs of the digital environment: Visibility

Concerns about privacy and visibility also emerged from students' discussions on risk, with a number of students highlighting that content may be more risky where 'everyone can see it', and equally less so when 'nobody will see it' or notice it. This provides support for boyd and Marwick's (2014) assertion that far from being reckless online, many young people occupy the position of careful risk managers when it comes to their social media, altering settings and platforms to ensure that only certain audiences are able to view certain content. Friendship, intimacy and trust are all

central to young people's risk assessments and this means that there is a clear distinction between what is socially 'hidden', versus what is 'revealed' publicly, even in the online environment (Pilkington, 2007). This supports Douglas' (1992) concept of risk as pollution; something breaching boundaries, 'spilling' out of the original intended context, 'contaminating' other groups. This also echoes many concerns of adults in relation to children's use of social media and the internet, in the sense of a symbolic 'leaking' or 'spreading' of that which ought to be contained (Albury, 2017). Conversely, many students suggested that the Internet could also be a place for content to be missed, disappear or remain 'invisible', as much as a place for it to be seen. The assertion that content might not be noticed or picked up, despite being published online, counters adult risk-management narratives of social media as a public and permanent space, instead reconceptualising it as a place for fleeting and ephemeral communication, easily lost among the mass of other noise. This evidence highlights the value of campaigns such as '5Rights' and amendments to the GDPR[21] giving young people more control over their data under Article 8 HRA, including the collection, usage, access and erasure of information relating to their social media use.

Some students felt that the risk would be higher for content posted online by senders with larger audience (i.e. a higher number of followers). This may simply be because the likelihood of the content 'being seen' (including by the subject) is therefore much higher, but may also indicate perspectives on power and responsibility online. Those with larger social audiences are perhaps expected to be more careful and considerate risk-managers than people who are 'nobodies' (no one will see or care about their posts). One student said that if broadcaster and celebrity 'Alan Davies' had posted comment J ("Beyonce is nothing…") then it might represent a higher risk. The comment reveals an interesting construct of celebrities and high-profile figures online. 'Alan Davies' carries extra risks that come with having influence and visibility, due to his fame, while 'Beyoncé' ought to *expect* online abuse, due to her fame, and is perceived to not notice or care. By making oneself 'visible', for example by pursuing celebrity status, it seems that one is accepting the management of additional 'risks', which are perhaps constructed as accompanying the 'benefits' to a high profile. The overarching expectations seem to be much higher for celebrities in terms of how they conduct themselves - and what they put up with – online. Yet, the architecture of social media is designed to encourage everyday users to pursue micro-celebrity

[21] The Data Protection Act 2018 came into force on 25 May 2018 and incorporates the EU General Data Protection Regulation (the "GDPR") into law in the UK. Provisions include data subject rights and specific protections for children: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted

status, something constructed as attainable to all individuals (Marwick and boyd, 2010:121; Senft, 2008). Potentially all and any who engage with social media could therefore be conceived of as 'pursuing' fame and attention. If discourses of reflexive modernisation and governmentality prevail, then ordinary users may be individually *responsibilised* for managing these risks, yet without any of the advantages (wealth, connections, advisory teams etc.) of actual celebrities.

Humour

A range of the examples presented to groups were discussed as having a lower risk due to the fact the sender 'could be joking', implying that humour is a potentially neutralising risk factor. Existing youth studies have highlighted how humour and 'banter' strengthen social bonds, whether that be through sharing in a transgressive joke that others might disapprove of, or as a coping tool for disguising how hurtful, shocking or offensive something might be when in front of peers (Shariff, 2005; Byron, 2008; Staksrud and Livingstone, 2009; Davis, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2014; Livingstone et al, 2014; Shariff, 2015; Salter, 2017). Humour is central to symbolic/cultural constructs of risk in the sense that it relates to inclusion; there is pressure to literally be 'in' on a joke, rather than risk isolation for being a 'killjoy' taking things too seriously. Risky forms of humour can also be viewed as a form of edgework, as any comedian may attest: pushing social boundaries with subversive jokes is not only fun and pleasurable, but can help conversely help individuals to *gain* social status (Lyng, 1990). This is where labeling theory remains pertinent, as it is the social reaction to the behaviour that ultimately defines how 'deviant' or acceptable it is (Becker, 1963). This is further explanation of young people's perceived need to self-regulate online, carefully managing the access of appropriate audiences of their content (Marwick and boyd, 2010; Rose, 1996).

There was one major exception to the general trend of jokes and humour decreasing the risk to a sender, however, and this was post D ("…@Heathrow airport…BOOM!"), where many student asserted that even if it was a joke, it could still be taken seriously and result in police action, and was therefore high risk. This suggests students' perceive there to be a limit to the risk-neutralising potential of humour and/or a sender's ability to dictate the 'meaning' of a message. In this case, the social audience 'outside' of the joke are constructed as being able to apply an alternative, 'serious', label to the content and impose sanctions, even if the sender is just joking. This is not to say that there is always a clear dichotomy between the serious and the funny; some students acknowledged that it might still be thought of as funny among

peers (‘*if they’re off on a lads’ holiday’*) even though it was risky. So-called ‘lads’ humour and lad culture often relies upon subverting what is socially acceptable, as does humour associated with online ‘trolls’ (Phipps and Young, 2013; Bishop, 2013). In this sense, being in trouble with the police for a bomb-related post might even be seen to *increase* the humorous potential, and therefore the social status of the sender, among an audience of peers online, despite the risks. It is important to remember that just because risky behaviour crosses or pushes boundaries, or subverts the social order, it does not always follow that it is always negative (Douglas, 2002). Under the right circumstances, individuals who take risks can be constructed as entrepreneurial, innovative or opportunistic, even if morally questionable (Lyng, 1990; Gill, 2014). If it is the case that neoliberal reflexive modernity demands individuals construct a seemingly unique, entrepreneurial biographical narrative, then it follows that going ‘against the crowd’ and ‘standing out’ are in many ways encouraged; constructing risk-taking as something to *aspire to*, as well as avoid (Rose, 1996; Beck, 1992; Beck and GernsheiM, 2002).

Freedom of expression/Free speech

Students tended to perceive that the ‘truthful’ nature of a post would be a risk-reducing factor. Even in cases of racist or threatening content, such as posts A (“Gurkhas are filth…”) and F (“Waiting at the gate….”), some responses indicate a view that a sender may have ‘legitimate’ motive or reason for the post, based upon other potentially unknown facts (e.g. *“if you’d been abused by them”, “there might be a reason”*). In some cases the ‘truth’ of a potentially offensive post was seen to be a positive thing, ‘helpful’ even, suggesting that ‘speaking the truth’ or even simply exercising a sender’s right to free speech was considered by young participants in balance with any potential risks. This demonstrates ‘Appeal to Higher Loyalties’ technique of neutralisation, where other more important values override negative feelings about deviant behaviour (Sykes and Matza, 1957). In response to post H (“Peter you are gay…”), many students expressed a view that, if it were *true*, the risk to the sender would be reduced. This could represent awareness of media law (‘truth’ is a legitimate defence to claims of libel, but not breach of privacy). It could also represent prioritisation of a sender’s right to speak the truth (freedom of expression) over an individual’s right to privacy. The ‘fact’ of Peter being gay means there is seen to be little risk in posting this information online: the harm, and therefore risk, is mostly associated with the allegation being false, and potentially damaging as a result (echoing findings from Talwar et al, 2014). It is unclear why participants did not feel public statements about Peter’s sexuality would be harmful *only* if false. There

appears to be both a perception of being gay as 'reputation-damaging' if false, but also contradictory assertions that Peter should not be offended, or has nothing to feel ashamed of, if it were true. The paradigm of lies as damaging (harmful) and truth as righteous (harmless) therefore distorts the concept of individual privacy rights, particularly in relation to sensitive or personal information such as sexuality.

The 'truthfulness' of a post affecting the risk to the sender was mostly discussed in response to post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"). What was surprising is the extent to which this was assumed by many students to be 'lying' or 'rumours', with a dominant concern for risk constructed as the reputation ruining allegations for the teacher. On first analysis, this appears to be upholding fairly standard moral principles: Spreading lies is harmful and wrong; one must think about the consequences of one's actions on others etc. Yet some students argued that the risk would remain high if it was true, or even that the truth was somewhat irrelevant to the level of risk. The public disclosure of a teacher-student relationship being constructed as risky contradicts the 'truth as righteous/harmless' paradigm previously mentioned; in this case, revealing or exposing the truth is re-framed as *risky*. This is hardly surprising considering the broader context of how child sexual abuse is denied and silenced more generally within society (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013), and the 'culture of silence' surrounding sexual pressures on girls (Ringrose et al, 2012). As is the case with humour, truth is therefore not *universally* perceived as a risk-reducing factor, and how children perceive (and presumably manage) this is likely to be highly context-specific. As previously emphasised, this also highlights the need for clearer education, support and strategies for young people facing disclosure dilemmas.

Similar to the risk-neutralising narrative of 'just saying', 'just opinion' was another common trend emerging from students' responses to online posts. It is interesting how 'just a stating fact'/'speaking truth' and 'just expressing an opinion' were both seen as risk reduction factors. This implies an individual sender's right to freedom of expression was considered as part of participants' risk judgements, in balance with other factors, such as impact on a subject. At times this also manifested in the form of high-risk rating due to the view that '*we don't have free speech in this country',* or low-risk rating due to a perceived oversensitive social audience ('*saying Man City is a bad football team will offend some people'*). Often claims that a post was just expressing an opinion (and was therefore low risk) related to negative comments about a school (posts K and L) or justifying rape (post C), reflecting accurately that there are 'no laws' against this kind of expression, however socially unacceptable it may be. At

other times, this argument (that it was 'just the opinion' of a sender) was also applied to posts of a racist, homophobic and/or sexist nature (e.g. A, E and J). This is not to say that that the content was not negatively judged from a moral perspective, as most students asserted that these kinds of comments were '*really bad'* and '*offensive'*, but rather - as fits with Sykes and Matza's theory (1957) - there is an acknowledgement of deviance, but techniques of neutralisation (freedom of expression representing an 'Appeal to Higher Loyalties') are then employed to argue that the risk is not particularly high.

It is arguable that perceptions of low-risk of posting homophobic, racist or misogynistic 'opinion' online demonstrate how expression of these sentiments in many ways *uphold*, rather than subvert, existing social norms. This is because the white, patriarchal and heteronormative cultures of online spaces represent a relatively 'safe'/low-risk environment within which to express these kinds of views. Studies have shown that cyberbullying victims tend to be targeted on the grounds of race, gender and sexuality, amongst other identity factors, and that it is not unusual for children to experience or witness this kind of content online (Cassidy et al, 2009; Livingstone and Haddon, 2009; Davis, 2012; Cesaroni et al, 2012; Livingstone et al 2014; Rice et al, 2015; Shariff, 2015). Salter discusses how it may be perceived as 'riskier' to express support for gender, racial and LGBT+ equality, inclusion or progression online, as this may be viewed as challenging the cultural hegemony of white, straight, cisgender males (2017). An interactionist approach would conclude that, since these perspectives are constructed through social interactions, it is important that prejudiced viewpoints are actively challenged, deconstructed and eradicated within online spaces where possible. This responsibility, both practically and ideally, ought to lie with the commercial entities that operate and profit from online content, although this is also problematic given that trust in these platforms' ability (and will) to regulate hate speech is dwindling[22].

Blame, retribution and justice

For some posts, the actions of a victim/subject were discussed at length when assessing how the risk (or responsibility) of a sender might be reduced. This was particularly the case for the two most debated examples, post G ("You gotta watch this video of Alice…") and post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"). Responses indicate that constructs of 'consent' were blurred with notions of responsibility, culpability or blame,

[22] For example, see coverage of Twitter's initial refusal to remove Infowars' Alex Jones from the platform (Ainge-Roy, 2018)

with this generally utilised as techniques of neutralisation (Denial of the Victim) (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Similarly, in response to post H ("Peter, you are GAY…") the target was at times constructed as being in position of choice; they could 'choose' to be offended, and therefore harmed/injured, or 'choose' not to be (Denial of Injury). This to some extent reproduces the responsibilisation narrative of late modernity, where citizens are forced to choose in every aspect of their lives as part of a constructing an individualised reflexive biography (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990). For 'Alice' (post G), there is a focus upon her past decisions, and whether this can alleviate responsibility (and therefore risk) for the sender in the present. With 'Peter' (post H), he faces a 'choice' to be offended in the future that impacts on the risk to the sender in the present, with some students claiming that he should choose *not* to be offended/injured. This highlights the ways in which the socio-cultural construct of the ideal, self-managing citizen is relevant to young people's assessment of risk and responsibility online. The implication is that even when one is victimised, one must carefully consider one's individual choices and (re)actions in order to best manage any potential harms. It is vital that cyber education and policing initiatives try to provide a counter narrative to what is essentially an individualised, victim-blaming rhetoric of 'choosing' risk and harm, when risk-taking behaviours are more likely to be rooted in collective cultural norms (Douglas, 1992; Lupton, 1999a; Lupton and Tulloch, 2002; Pilkington, 2007; Lee and Crofts, 2015.)

There is some evidence among student perspectives that targets or subjects of online posts might 'deserve' the content posted about them, with some responses to posts A, F and K suggesting that a sender might've posted in *reaction* to being provoked. Previous studies have shown that children may also explain their reasons for cyberbullying in this way (Cassidy et al, 2009). This can be conceptualised as multiple techniques of neutralisation acting at once: Firstly, the shift of focus onto the behaviour of the subject detracts from that of the sender (Denial of Responsibility). Secondly, the victim having provoked a reaction undermines their right to claim victimisation (Denial of the Victim). Also, the notion of 'tit for tat' or reacting in response to another's behaviour may be constructed as form of obtaining justice/retribution for an original offence (Appeal to Higher Loyalties) (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Once again, these constructs provide further support to theories of the individually reponsibilised 'ideal citizen' (Beck, 1992; Giddens 1991): A target may be reponsibilised for their own victimisation through the narrative of blame for prior provoking actions, just as senders are reponsibilised for taking individual action against a target who offended them. Douglas also argues in 'Risk and Blame' that

one way of explaining misfortune is to attribute it to "individual adversaries", with victims characterised as 'not being smart enough' to look after themselves in a community "beset by rivals, and where the call to action will be for compensation at least, and probably vengeance" (2002:5). This construct of 'tit for tat' justice also suggests that it is primarily individuals, rather than external authorities (such as police, parents or social media platforms) who are perceived as responsible for managing online risk, crime and harm. The mode of thinking expressed by participants potentially undermines current advice to young people to 'report' (i.e. refer to authorities) if they experience anything upsetting online, due to the risk that they may feel they ought to 'deal with it' individually, as per these narratives.

Risk, reason and emotion

Students' discussion of 'reasons' for posts seem to imply that a sender's actions might be perceived as 'reasonable' (or at least justifiable), depending on the circumstances leading up to the post. This process of defending a sender evokes the construction of the 'reasonable man', an important concept in legal and criminal justice framework when attempting to make objective judgements about a defendant's behaviour (Nourse, 2008). Within law, there remains an assumption that 'reason' is somehow distinct from 'emotion', and that it is the former rather than the latter that ought to be privileged when making judgements (Maroney, 2006). Within both the sociology of risk, criminology literature and health studies, there are discussions of how 'reasonable' or 'rational' behaviours tend to be positioned as preferable alternatives to 'irrational' (and particularly emotional) behaviours (Lupton, 2013; Apel, 2013). There are obvious overlaps between the construction of the 'rational actor' as a key feature of late modernity, and older constructs of the 'reasonable man' within law and the 'rational offender' within criminology (Alvi et al, 2015; Barnard-Wills, 2012; Beccaria, 1964/2009) Given the long history of 'rationality' or 'reasonableness' as a starting point for expectations and assessments of human behaviour, it is unsurprising that young people draw on these paradigms when considering how risky or deviant different types of online content might be.

As well as attempting to construct a sender as 'rational' or 'reasonable' as part of a potential defence for their actions, some students did the opposite: excusing, justifying or downplaying behaviour by characterising a sender as 'emotional': potentially just "jealous", "upset" or being a "drama queen". The concept of emotion as a risk-reducing factor is underpinned by the very same paradigms that privilege rationality and reasonableness: people are less culpable for their behaviour when in

an emotional state. In both cases (justification of behaviour the grounds of a sender being 'reasonable'/rational or 'emotional'/irrational), students demonstrated a clear process of *empathising* with a sender and attempting to imagine their motivations for posting the content. This provides a counter argument to the claim that bystanders who do not speak up, or those who excuse abusive behaviour, are somehow morally disengaged or lacking in empathy. One of the common arguments within the existing literature is that the behaviour of cyberbullies, and bullies in general, is explained as a process of 'moral disengagement' (Perren and Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Talwar et al, 2014; Kyriacou and Zuin, 2016; Myers and Cowie, 2017). This is similar for studies into criminality and deviance (Bandura, 2002; Maruna and Copes, 2005). In contrast, this research suggests that participants who excused, downplayed or defended abusive content did so not because of a lack of empathy for a target/victim, but potentially because of moral and emotional empathy a the sender/offender. It would therefore perhaps be useful for anti-bullying initiatives to try to avoid morally pathologising bullies or bystanders as 'lacking in emotions or empathy', as this may not always be the case.

Although students did not always articulate a clear perspective of future consequences for the sender (i.e. sanctions), many were confident imagining the potential emotional impact on a target/subject. Often students' perspectives of risk were linked with empathic understanding of the impact a post might have on someone, asserting that it might make them "unhappy", "worried", "embarrassed" or "make them feel bad about themselves" etc. There was a distinction between perceptions of hurting someone's feelings, however, and affecting a subject/target in more material ways beyond that. This was demonstrated most clearly with responses to post I ("Jenny is a right slag…"). Whereas other posts, such as G or E, were seen as having potential to cause emotional harm, responses to post I emphasise the potential for job loss and arrest for the teacher. Students did *not* tend to argue that Mr Sanders might be 'upset' or 'worried' in the way that they did for other targets, rather the risks were imagined as more material consequences 'beyond the emotional realm'. Notably, this contradicts arguments within other discussions, where online content was defended as 'just words' (i.e. not having any 'real', physical or material impact). With this particular post at least, the publication of words online was viewed as having very real consequences offline – for the accused, at least.

Finally, some students briefly discussed the potential for emotion as a social sanction or consequence for the sender. This could either be external (e.g. 'anger' or 'upset'

reactions from others) or internal (e.g. 'embarrassment' felt by the sender). In particular, post B (referencing Zayn leaving One Direction) and post L (alluding to being hungover at school) seemed to divide student opinion as to whether they might damage a sender's reputation, or not. With post C ("…If a girl's too drunk to say no…."), students also raised the possibility of creating reputational damage to oneself by sending this message. There is clearly some awareness of being socially judged and that to some extent individuals should perhaps be careful to manage what they decide to post online, and yet, there is an overwhelming lack of consensus as to whether *these specific examples* would be risky or not. The risk is unclear perhaps primarily because it is not known whether the 'social audience' would in these cases consider the posts problematic or not (Lemert, 1981; Becker 1963).

It is possible that the speed at which social media allows publication of content, and the huge potential audience reach, means that norms are changing in terms of what is considered to be 'socially acceptable' to post online (see: McAfee, 2012; Ofcom, 2017). In a positive sense, social media sharing allows previously taboo or hidden topics, such as mental health or sexual harassment to be discussed more openly and widely. Yet there is still a pressure to present an 'idealised version of the self' online, or at the very least construct 'frontstage' and 'backstage' versions for different audiences (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013; Goffman, 1959). It seems there are contradictory pressures for young people to be 'authentic' online, yet simultaneously adhere to idealised constructs of the self (described as the 'paradox of realness' in relation to post-feminist contradictions of beauty; see: Gill and Elias, 2014). This is complicated further by the fact that 'authenticity' is in itself a social construct and that identity presentation on social media remains a collective, collaborative process, reliant on interaction with the social audience (Marwick and boyd, 2011). It may be that young people still feel social and culture pressure to perform a version of the 'ideal citizen/self', but - due to the diverse nature of audiences online - it is somewhat impossible to judge what this actually represents in practice. As always, the critical question remains 'who decides?'; the individual is forced to choose without full knowledge of whom it is that may be judging them, now or in the future.

Risk and the importance of knowledge

While students were generally quick to indicate when they felt a boundary had been breached (be it social, moral or legal) in their discussions, articulating the consequences of said transgression appeared to be more challenging. Responses indicate a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty, with few occasions when posts were

viewed as having an inevitable outcome, particularly with regard to sanctions (perhaps the main exception being post D: "@Heathrow Airport…."). When consequences were imagined and discussed, they tended to be vague ("told off") and implied multiple possibilities ("maybe more than told off", "could be" arrested etc.). If predictions are part of attempts to manage and control risk, through 'colonising the future', this was not on the whole exhibited by many of the young participants in this study (Giddens, 1991).

It may be simply that uncertainty of future consequences has become a more accepted dimension of everyday life for young people growing up in late modernity (Giddens, 1999; Lee, 2001). It may also be that children, particularly younger ones, struggle to consider future consequences of actions, having had fewer experiences. This is one of the arguments for proposing to raise the age of criminal responsibility in England above the current age of 10. While some arguments for this, particularly within the field of psychology, tend to rely on the notion of children's limited capacity (i.e. their ability to distinguish 'right' actions from 'wrong'), others argue it is more relevant to consider children's ability to fully appreciate the consequences of said action (Apel, 2013). During 'The Bulger Killers: Was Justice Done?', a documentary investigating the 1993 murder trial of two ten year olds, one of the boys' lawyers claimed that knowing that 'killing is wrong' is *not* the same as understanding the full impact of this act in the long term future (Channel 4, 2018). If risk is conceptualised as "the possibility that human actions or events lead to *consequences* that harm aspects of things that human beings value", this makes it somewhat distinct from moral evaluations of human behaviour considered purely in the present (Klinke & Renn, 2002: 1071, quoted in Staksrud and Livingstone, 2009: 365 – my emphasis). The findings from this study support arguments that some young people may not be able to determine and explain the potential consequences of a post, as easily as simply recognise problematic content. Whether or not this makes their understandings or capabilities distinct from that of adults is another question for a future study.

In terms of sources of knowledge referenced during student discussions of potential consequences, the primary one mentioned was the news media. Sometimes a student might highlight their knowledge of a particular case, for example where an online offender faced legal consequences. Few students cited adults as a source of knowledge, such as parents or teachers, despite numerous initiatives encouraging adults to proactively engage with children to educate them about online risks (Byron,

2008; Livingstone and Haddon, 2009; Bailey and Steeves, 2015). Similarly, none of the participants cited classes at school or even the Internet as a source of risk information to support their arguments. This suggests that the news media remains a dominant influence on young people's perceptions of consequences for online offending, perhaps even socially amplifying those risks (Kasperson & Kasperson, 2017). Overall, the most commonly perceived consequence across all the examples was the risk of civil litigation ('Orange' category), even at times for criminal offences such as revenge porn or hate speech. This may also be influenced by news media coverage, which can emphasise narratives of victims' individual pursuit of justice and compensation through the courts, particularly after 'failure' of the state to prosecute their offenders (for example, see Chrissy Chambers' case: Kleeman, 2018).

Risk and responsibility

The narrative of the victim as 'self-seeking' justice independently from authorities or the state is one that frequently emerged from student discussions. Even in the case of racist or homophobic hate speech, some students perceived the most likely risk as being sued by the victimised group, above that of criminal repercussions, such as arrest. This, again, suggests a potential framing of responsibility for 'managing' online abuse or threats as lying with *victims*, rather than any external authority. Firstly, this supports the idea that individuals – even victims - are expected to be self-actualising when it comes to risk-management, in line with neo-liberal techniques of governance (Foucault, 1991; Trnka and Trundle, 2014; Karaian, 2013). Secondly, it may also indicate a perceived inability of authorities to effectively secure justice for individuals, a sign of declining trust and deference in established institutions (Young, 2007; Greer and McLaughlin, 2016). This includes not only the criminal justice system and police, but potentially also traditional institutions such as the school and the family, neither of which were discussed in any detail as potentially managing the negative consequences on behalf of a victimised individual.

Ironically, consequences or sanctions from a school were constructed mostly in terms of a drive to protect itself, and its reputation, rather than individual pupils whom it is responsible for. Schools were rarely positioned as sanctioning authorities with a duty to manage online risks to children, even in response to posts that seemed to indicate peer-to-peer aggression (e.g. post F: "Waiting at the gates…." and post G: "You gotta watch this video of Alice…"). This may be explained in part by the nature of the research methods, as the idea of alerting school authorities to online bullying may not seem 'cool' to mention in a peer focus group (further evidence of the construct of

'self-managing citizen' as being ideal). It is also possible that students genuinely do not perceive school authorities as having any power or responsibility to protect its pupils. Education institutes – and perhaps adults generally – are viewed as primarily having responsibility towards themselves, rather than others.

Existing research has shown how perceptions of school norms influence students' behaviour outside of the classroom, including in relation to cyberbullying (Elledge et al, 2013). Equally, perceptions of a schools' ability to help, or hinder, an online victim affect reporting rates and young people's likelihood of seeking support, which is generally quite low (Bets and Spenser, 2015; Whitaker and Kowalski, 2015; Benzmiller, 2013; Cassidy et al, 2013; Jackson et al, 2009). Previous studies show students perception of online victimisation as "the student's problem" and "not the schools' mandate" is a significant factor in their decision not to report problems, which may also be the case in this research (Cassidy et al, 2009: 392). Similarly, students rarely mentioned technology companies or website operators in terms of having sanctioning powers or responsibilities, despite this being a huge focus of the online child safety debates among adults (Byron, 2008; Savirimuthu, 2012; Young et al, 2016). The absence of any significant discussion of schools or social media hosts enforcing sanctions against a sender suggests that they're constructed as either ineffective, or simply not responsible for managing online abuse. This, too, implies an internalisation of neoliberal ideology, particularly that of a "shrinking state mandate", "deregulation and privatisation", coupled with a greater influence on individuals' choices and abilities to 'self-manage' (Trnka and Trundle, 2014: 137; Howie and Campbell, 2016).

The perception of civil litigation as the most likely risk outcome overall for problematic online behaviour could reflect broader perceptions of law and the criminal justice system. Although the right to 'free speech'/freedom of expression was emphasised among student discussion, at times this was diminished due to powerful individuals' right to protect their reputation. Particularly for examples I ("Jenny is a right slag….") and J ("Beyonce is nothing…"), the risk was viewed to increase due to the ability (and/or likelihood) of the target to seek retribution through suing the sender. This 'ability' of a target/victim to seek retribution through contacting the *police* was not as prominent in students' discussions of potential outcomes. This potentially suggests that the law itself may be perceived as a tool for powerful individuals or institutions to utilise for punitive retribution, and less so as a right-based tool for justice for victimised individuals. The construction of those in power as being able to use

litigation as a tool for control and manipulation is something that has been highlighted by recent news media coverage of abuse scandals. High profile abusers such as Weinstein and Saville were able to utilise non-disclosure agreements or threats of defamation to silence their accusers, while victims of abuse are more likely to be constructed as having been 'failed by the authorities' (BBC News, 2017; Greer and McLaughlin, 2013). This potentially exacerbates the perception of individuals as being forced to pro-actively pursue justice through the civil courts, rather than expect to 'receive' justice as a citizen of the state and/or a victim of crime.

This is something that has also been discussed in terms of an 'autonomy paradigm', a concept specifically explored in relation to gender and harassment, although the concept could be applied to any marginalized or under-represented group (Nielsen, 2000). It reflects desires for strengthened legal protections for vulnerable groups who are more likely to be victimised, while also desiring increased autonomy, inclusion and advocacy of those groups. The demand for what is perceived to be 'special treatment' is therefore viewed as undermining the demand for 'equal treatment' or, in other words, "the price of citizenship… is that one must stand up for oneself, rather than rely on state intervention" (Nielsen, 2000:1079-80). It represents the ultimate technique of neoliberal governance: the dominant narrative is that citizens cannot have their cake (autonomy) and eat it (expect an authority to act on their behalf), a paradigm often utilised by right-wing political commentators to undermine campaigns for greater equality for minority groups[23]. The construction of a false dichotomy between 'protection' and 'autonomy' becomes even more problematic than it already is when applied to children, and no doubt contributes further to the marginalisation of young people and erosion of their freedom and autonomy: we expect authorities to act (and where necessary, intervene) in order to protect children, but this can all too often result in paternalism (Kitzinger, 1988; Jackson and Scott, 1999). Citizenship and PSHE education therefore needs to strongly challenge the 'autonomy paradigm', and emphasising that protections *and* freedoms are part of one's human rights, and must be considered in balance with one another.

Denial and determinism

Many students expressed a perception of there being little or no risk, or (more specifically) no potential negative consequences for a sender who posted problematic content online. This tended to be based upon two main constructions; firstly, that the

[23] For a classic example, see Conservative MP Philip Davies literally stating that feminists want to "have their cake and eat it" at an international men's rights conference (Mortimer, 2016)

online environment is essentially un-policed ("nothing happens" to people who post this, "police won't do anything" etc.), and secondly, that abusive or offensive content is widespread, and therefore normalised ("everybody says things like this", "this happens all the time"). The first response echoes what previous cyberbullying studies have found, namely that young people often perceive that positive consequences for reporting victimisation – such as adult interventions, sanctions for the abuser etc. - are unlikely, and that this in turn means they would be unlikely to report it (Jackson et al, 2009; Li, 2010; Benzmiller, 2013; Cassidy et al, 2013; Bets and Spenser, 2015; Whitaker and Kowalski, 2015, etc.) Equally, existing studies have shown how digital abuse, like other forms of bullying, are rhetorically 'accepted' by young people as being somewhat inevitable: the behaviours are morally condemned, but still framed as something that 'just happens' (Vaillancourt, et al 2008; Parris et al, 2012; Ringrose et al, 2012; Smahel and Wright, 2014).

These narratives, '[abusive content] just happens' and 'nothing happens [if you report it]', both indicate a somewhat fatalistic attitude to risk. It is argued that those who are most marginalised or excluded (and least likely to feel a sense of agency) are more likely to have fatalistic attitudes to risk – somewhat similar to theories of 'drift' or 'urban cynicism' (Douglas, 1992; Matza, 1954; White 1999; Smahel and Wright, 2014). One can understand how victims of online abuse, or even perpetrators, might perceive the situation as not being within their control/responsibility, however this research has shed light on the extent to which the *social audience* (e.g. potential bystanders) might also deny, downplay or fatalistically normalise these kinds of behaviours in an online context. Cohen (2001) claims there are four types of denial (literal, interpretative, implicatory and post-moral), with post-moral perhaps representing the closest to a form of fatalism; a 'who cares anyway?' being the ultimate rejection of agency, and therefore responsibility, to manage risk. This positioning from young people must, however, be viewed not as individual failure, xbut acknowledged within the social, cultural, political and moral context of relentless pressure to 'self-manage', predict and regulate almost every aspect of one's life (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Rose, 1996). With this in mind, fatalistic perspectives can be viewed perhaps as more of a coping strategy than anything else.

Parker and Stanworth (2005) explore the various modes of response to risk, many of which have been demonstrated by the empirical data from this study (see Fig. L)

Mode of response	Example within this study
Attempt to maximise control	Asserting a fixed interpretation of a post or certainty of outcome, or showcasing knowledge of previous cases or legal terminology to enhance legitimacy.
Deny or downplay the existence of risk	Denying or downplaying the possibility of any formal sanctions, asserting no consequences for behaviour, claiming no-one will 'see' or 'care' about content.
Engaging in symbolic control	Using 'othering' techniques to create symbolic distance with targets, asserting posts as 'only words' etc.
Displacement activity	Focusing concern elsewhere, for example the role/responsibility of others, such as the target/victim.
Follow traditional rules	Reverting to paradigms (e.g. truth as righteous, lies as harmful) or Appealing to Higher Loyalties
Follow intuition or an emotional response	Highlighting how 'bad' a post is thought to be, or how 'serious' or not (i.e. if thought to be joking) in tone. Assessing 'offensiveness'.
Place oneself in the hands of another (fatalism/relinquishing control)	Asserting that online abuse 'just happens' or that 'nothing happens' (to perpetrators), or that anything would offend someone

Fig. L: Modes of response to risk. Adapted from Parker and Stanworth (2005: 321)

There are two further suggestions to modes of response to risk that I would like to contribute from this study. The first is *embracing uncertainty/relativism*: Highlighting ambiguity and subjectivity through recognising the possibility of a variety of interpretations of a single post and recognising how unlikely consensus is on one universal definition. Despite the diversity of viewpoints expressed during focus groups, there was little conflict observed over a definitive assertion of 'who was right' among participants. This potentially shows the extent to which diverse and subjective

interpretations are all acknowledged as potentially being valid, even a rejection of the concept of risk or meaning as objective and 'knowable', with a focus instead on considering multiple alternative and conflicting perspectives. While this could perhaps be viewed as an extension of the final category of 'relinquishing control to others', the distinction is that there is recognition of a sender's (or audience's/target's) ability to contest the interpretation of the post or the behaviour, and therefore influence the discussions and labelling process. In simple terms, the response to risk is: 'It's complicated', to coin the title of boyd's ethnographic research into teenager's experiences with social media (2014). The challenge for policy-makers is to what extent complete relativism poses a risk in itself. Social media offer us a global network of communications spanning jurisdictions, cultures and even time, and there may be fears that this mode of response to risk is characteristic of a so-called 'post-truth' or 'post-fact' era.

The second mode of response is that of *self-inuration or resilience*: Perspectives expressed by young participants in this study indicate evidence of fatalistic attitudes *coupled with* constructs of an individualised, self-managing, autonomous citizen, mirroring the contradictions highlighted within Beck's Risk Society (1992). These are accompanied by indication of a perceived lack of reliance/trust in authorities to effectively intervene and manage risk online. In this sense, there is a mode of response indicating the need for an 'inured self': one who is able to withstand external risks that are not within their control, while simultaneously skilfully managing those that are, and – importantly – knowing the difference. 'Digital Resilience' now constitutes one of the five 'topical issues' working groups within the UK Council for Child Internet Safety. This was prompted by a study and report by ParentZone in 2014, which used self-determination theory as a framework and defined resilience as:

> "An individual's ability to accurately *adapt to changing and sometimes stressful environments* and to feel *empowered to act instead of react* in the face of both novel and threatening challenges. By applying a psychological research perspective, this research posits that young people's ability to *effectively self-regulate* their media use actually increases their resilience when encountering potentially harmful or inappropriate content online" (Przybylski, Mishkin, Shotbold and Linington, 2014: 4 – my emphasis)

A follow up report, commissioned a few years' later, asserts:

> "Resilience is not something you can foster by eliminating risk – to become truly resilient, you must be allowed to practise *managing and evaluating risky scenarios*" (Rosen, 2017:6 – my emphasis)

The concept of 'resilience' is an increasing trend within risk literature and discourse, with the idea of 'coping with' adversity, 'bouncing back' from trauma and 'managing' risks framed as a positive, even necessary, skill one has to develop as part of growing up, enabling one to not only survive but thrive in the face of society's challenges (Rosen, 2017; Przybylski et al, 2014; Coleman and Hagell, 2007). The challenge for policy makers is to resist conceptualising resilience as a "general psychological characteristic" (Jackson, Born and Jacob, 1997: 615), but instead recognising that risk and resilience factors are often social, collective or structural (Navarro, 2015; Rosen, 2017). It is important to be wary that youth digital resilience does not become conflated with the concept of the self-managing, neoliberal citizen of the governmentality approach to risk. Self-governance, self-responsibility and self-care are positioned as the 'solutions' to achieving self-actualisation: "young people are expected to become rational, autonomous, choice-making, risk aware, prudential, responsible and enterprising" (Powell and Edwards, 2003: 88; Kelly, 2006; Kelly; 2015; Rose, 1996). To what extend the addition of 'resilient' to this list represents a burden or a benefit to young people growing up digital remains to be seen.

Future implications

Despite having been established and accessible before many of the participants in this study were even born, the Internet is still viewed by many as a symbolic 'Wild West'; unregulated and unsafe, especially for children (Byron, 2008; Savirimuthu, 2012; NSPCC, 2018). Perhaps this is the case because it is the symbolic state of 'youth' itself that most represents the root of our fears: "Adult anxieties about young people are not new phenomena. Youth has historically occupied the 'wild zones'… 'Ungovernable' and lacking in 'self-regulation'" (Kelly, 2000: 303). In this sense, it is hoped that this research has been able to contribute empirically, methodologically and theoretically towards addressing some of those anxieties, through exploring youth perspectives and examining many of the messy contradictions that underpin them. While media literacy may be viewed as the obvious 'solution' to concern about risk, rights and responsibility online, we must be cautious of assuming that dominant discourses and hierarchies of credibility do not remain unquestioned. We must not assume by virtue of their lowly social status, lack of experience or liminal positionality

that young people cannot contribute ‘knowledge’ on digital risks. Equally, we must remain critically aware that authority on law, policing, technology or education does not always represent full understanding of the risks to young people growing up digital. Development of digital citizenship curricula therefore need to involve ongoing conversation and mutual respect between all these key stakeholders, of which this research can contribute a very small part.

Key findings from this study suggest that stakeholders need to be wary that digital education initiatives do not exacerbate constructs of individualised responsibilisation, particularly in relation to young victims of crime, including sexual crime and image-based abuse. More work is needed to build trust in the authority of institutions to manage and challenge online risks, in particular threatening, abuse and hate-fuelled speech. Without this, there is a risk young people may be left feeling ‘nothing will be done’ and they must ‘deal with it’ themselves, perhaps even accepting that this is the price to be paid for having a digital life. There is a clear onus on technology companies responsible for managing online spaces to ensure that tolerance of hate, abuse and prejudice (racism, misogyny, homophobia etc.) does not escalate the assumption that this kind of content is essentially ‘normalised’ or ‘un-policed’ online, and therefore poses no risk. Also, it is vital that common cultural misconceptions and contradictions are explored within the PSHE and digital citizenship curricula, whether that be challenging the ‘autonomy paradigm’ (Neilsen, 2000), investigating the paradox of realness/authenticity online (Gill and Elias, 2014), or simply integrating a youth-led, rights-based approach to critical criminology within public legal education and policy (Powell-Jones, 2018).

One of the most notable findings from this research was the *lack* of consensus among young people in terms of their perception of risk and responsibility online, however this is less surprising given the complicated and rapidly shifting social context for governing digital media in the UK, explored in Chapter 1. Becker (1967: 242) highlights a contradiction in terms of sociological research with young people: “Most research on youth, after all, is clearly designed to find out why youth are so troublesome for adults, rather than asking the equally interesting sociological question, “Why do adults make so much trouble for youth?”” The impetus for this study was previous professional experience delivering workshops on social media law and ethics with young people in schools. At the time of writing, previous professional experience would also indicate that there is a need for further research to investigate

adults' perspectives of this topic further, too. It would be wrong to assume that participants' diverging perspectives or ignorance of the law is simply a result of their 'youth', rather than changes in broader social, cultural, political and technological norms, which affect all of us.

How do young people interpret and construct risk in an online context?

[Volume 2: Appendices and Bibliography]

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of example stimuli posts for discussion (A-L)[24] (266)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Quantified data

A. Number of times each of the risk categories were mentioned (collated) in response to each of the 12 example posts (267)

B. Number of times each of the risk categories were mentioned (collated) by each year group (268)

Appendix 2: Qualitative data: Verbatim quotes (arranged by example post A-L)

Post A (269)

Post B (270)

Post C (271)

Post D (272)

Post E (273)

Post F (274)

Post G (275)

Post H (276)

Post I (277)

Post J (278)

Post K (279)

Post L (280)

Bibliography (281- 317)

[24] Fig. F in Volume I

Table of example stimuli posts for discussion (A-L)		
Post	**Content**	**Potential risks**
A	"Gurkhas are filth who deserve to be shot. They don't wash, they lie, they abuse their kids and don't work. GET THEM OUT OF ALDERSHOT"	Racist hate speech, material inciting hatred/violence on grounds of nationality, Threatening/menacing
B	"I'M SO UPSET I WANT TO DIE! This will NEVER happen again :,(Why, Zayn, WHY?!!! (pic from @BBCNews)" [photograph of One Direction band]	Copyright issues re: photographic image Sensitive subject matter
C	"I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say not then it's her own fault for getting raped"	Justifying rape, misogynistic/sexist, sensitive subject matter,
D	"Massive delays @HeathrowAirport. If they don't get it sorted in the next fifteen minutes….. BOOM!!!!!!"	Threatening/menacing communication (implied)
E	"I'm sick to death of ******ing dykes round here! I swear I'm gonna smack the next one I see in the face!"	Homophobic hate speech, material inciting hatred/violence on the grounds of orientation, Threatening/menacing
F	"Waiting at the gates for my little friend. This time he won't even be able to walk once I'm finished"	Threatening/menacing, Harassment (implied)
G	"You gotta watch this video of Alice. What a massive slut! Youtube.com"	Distributing indecent images of under 18s/Private, sexual material with intent to cause humiliation, harassment, Misogynistic/sexist
H	"Peter: You are GAY. Everyone knows you love men, don't you?"	Harassment, Private subject matter (sexuality), Homophobic
I	"Jenny is a right slag. She loves giving it out. Especially to Mr. Sanders in the French classroom afterschool."	Identifying alleged child sex victim, identifying teacher accused of crimes against pupil, Defamation (if untrue) Misogynistic/sexist
J	"Beyonce is nothing but an ugly, black slut. She should just *****ing jump off a building."	Harassment, racial element as aggravating/motivating
K	"Collingwood College is an absolute dump. Anyone who sends their kids there is basically guilty of child neglect"	Social/reputation risk
L	"Ah, ******. Got double science first thing. On a monster hangover. #LifeSucks"	Social/reputation risk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Quantified data by example:

A. Number of times each of the risk categories were mentioned (collated) in response to each of the 12 example posts.

Highlights which examples tended to elicit more mentions of higher/lower risk categories, and which examples provoked a lot of discussion and diversity, and which were less contested.

For example, Posts G, I, C all include a sentiment of victim blaming/rape culture and are have the highest number of mentions of categories, suggesting they prompted the most debate and discussion.

Posts such as D show a 'lean' towards higher risk ratings, with a gradual reduction of mentions of lower risk categories.

Other posts such B and L show a trend towards lower risk categories.

Overall, the times each of the categories were mentioned is fairly evenly spread across criminal, civil and social risks, with civil (orange) being mentioned the most.

Risk/Post	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	TOTAL
Criminal (RED)	9	1	11	15	9	15	14	6	12	8	0	2	102
Civil (ORANGE)	7	2	9	5	8	9	25	11	17	11	4	4	112
Social (YELLOW)	3	10	12	4	12	8	9	12	12	5	7	14	108
None (GREEN)	0	9	1	1	0	2	2	4	0	1	4	10	34
TOTAL	19	22	33	25	29	34	50	33	41	25	15	30	356

B. Number of times each of the risk categories were mentioned (collated) by each year group

7+8 = 11 – 13 year olds.
9+10 = 13 – 15 year olds.
12+13 = 16 – 18 year olds.

(Note: No Year 11s participated in this research, at the schools' request, due to pressure to stay on timetable for GCSE exam preparation).

All of the age groups seem to have a fairly even spread of mentions across criminal, civil and social risk categories.

Generally, older students (aged 16+ years) were less likely than the younger groups to mention 'criminal risk' (Red) in response to the posts, and mentioned the 'social risk' (Yellow) category the most.

There are a higher number (frequency) of mentions of the risk categories among the younger groups, which is likely due to the large sized classes (i.e. more pupils in each group, and therefore more mentions of each category). Sixth form classes tend to be much smaller, so therefore there is slightly different risk categories mentioned overall.

Risk/Year group	7+8	9+10	12+13	TOTAL
Criminal (RED) mentions	54	29	19	102
Civil (ORANGE) mentions	65	26	21	112
Social (YELLOW) mentions	52	24	32	108
None (GREEN) mentions	17	3	14	43
Pupils (sample size)	(84)	(52)	(48)	(184)

Appendix 2: Qualitative data: Verbatim quotes (arranged by example post A-L)

[A] "Gurkhas are filth who deserve to be shot. They don't wash, they lie, they abuse their kids and don't work. GET THEM OUT OF ALDERSHOT!"

M/F/X	Group	Quotes
X	SB7A	Definitiely [R]. 'deserve to be shot'. It's…. [struggles to find the word: possibly searcing for the term 'racist'?] Threatening. We watched a social media programme where someone sent death threats and you can be arrested [for that].
X	BH7A	[R] Red. It's a bit racist. It's saying 'cause they're not British they don't want them in their country. It's extreme, saying they should be shot. And it's lying saying they don't wash and they abuse their kids. [O] Might be orange if you know that they're bad, or if you'd been abused by them.
X	SB8A	[R] or [O]. Kind of racist. Insensitive to people who fought in the army. [R] being rude. Racist. [O] don't think you could be arrested. Sued by the Gurkhas.
X	BH8A	[O] Quote offensive to people who helped us. Stereotyping. [R] Hate crime. Can be jailed [for that]. Maybe a red? Nothing happens on social media, noone gets into trouble, so many people say bad stuff.
X	BH9A	[O] 'should be killed' is not a threat, they're just saying it. Could be sued by the Gurkhas. [R] it's racism, which is a criminal offence. There's a lot of hate [in the message].
X	BH10A	[R] Red - hate speech. It doesn't say why they think that. It's disrespectful. Really bad. Without a motive.
X	BH12A	[Y] not really bad. You could say a whole race of people could go but you're not physically doing anything. Things like this are said all the time, you can't arrest everyone on the internet. It's a bit racist. Really offensive. Basically racist. Generalized. Doesn't say "shoot them" [as in it only says 'deserves to be shot'] that would be higher [if it did].
M	BH13A	[O] You don't get arrested for being racist. [O] Not tame enough to be a yellow. Offensive. Disgusting. Now I give it a second look I think maybe red [R]. It's full-on racist. [Y] Even thought it's disgusting as long as there's no physical violence it's okay. Free speech. It's an opinion
X	SB13A	[Y] Would you get arrested? Can't be sued, but bad. [R] Abusing kids accusation. 'shooting' [comment] is threatening. [It would be] taken seriously because somone put online that they were going to stab their teacher and then they did.

[B] "I'M SO UPSET I WANT TO DIE! This will NEVER happen again :'(Why, Zayn? WHY?!!! (pic from @BBCNEWS)" [image of One Direction]

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
X	SB7B	Fine - overreacting! Not safe to say you want to die 'cause lots of people could see it. I see a lot of people saying that online. [G] [Y] friends might get angry.
X	BH7B	[Y] Yellow because they might kill themselves. Could be a joke. It's a bit over-exaggerated. A stupid thing to say. [G] You don't know if they have a mental problem, so it could be more serious.
X	SB8B	[R] you shouldn't say you want to die. Suicide is illegal. [Y] No harm. Not aimed at anyone. [Y] 'want to die'… If your parents see. [Y] If you took the 'die' bit out it's ok. Can't get arrested for it. Kind of harming yourself. [G] Not offensive. Zayn won't see it.
X	BH8B	[G] Not that bad, just upset. Maybe a yellow. Nothing offensive against someone else. [Y] Kind of suicidal? But it's maybe not serious.
X	BH9B	[Y] 'cause they're saying they want to die. [G] it's not really offending anyone. They're just saying what they want to say, it's not anything bad. [Y] Could be in trouble with your parents. Sent somewhere where you would get help, special childline or something. It shows suicidal thoughts. [other kids laugh and she tells them its not funny, its serious - although she is also smiling]
X	BH10B	[Y] Saying you want to die is quite bad. Nothing nasty. You don't want to say that you want to die on social media. Probably doesn't mean it. Just being a drama queen
X	BH12B	[G] not against anyone. Just want attention. Could kill themselves? "Want to die"? Obviously don't mean it, so still [G].
M	BH13B	[G] Somone's opinion about a boyband. Doesn't offend anyone. "I want to die", people might be worried but don't think you'd get into trouble.
X	SB13B	[Y] or [G]. Joking. Not much risk. Might be embarrassed. [O] Civil - want to die? You'd want to make sure they're alright. [O] Taken the picture from the BBC website

[C] "I'm sorry but if a girl's too drunk to say no then it's her own fault for getting raped #justsaying"

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
x	SB7C	[R] [R] [O] - overall [O]. They could just have raped someone. It's wrong. It's agreeing with rape. Don't know if they did it, but they're agreeing with it. Rape victim could sue.
x	BH7C	[R] Is it homophobic? [teacher intervenes, saying 'Do you mean sexist? Against women?' and the student confirms that's what they meant.] It could be something personal. It's making fun of people who have been raped. That's illegal. [O] because you could find out who it is. You shouldn't put something like that on social media. Isn't it taking advantage of the girl? [R]. Saying she should've said no...[pulls a face, as in 'doesn't make sense' 'stupid'] 'Rape' means people can't stop it. [R]. [O] Just joking. If it actually happened they could get sued. [Y] Just sending a message, if just joking with friends. If it happened then [R]. '#JustSaying' makes it sound not as bad.
x	SB8C	[G] No risk. Bit rude. Offensive. But you couldn't get arrested. Not saying anything, just opinion. Rude and mean, judging people. The hashtag is going too far… [Y] Wouldn't be in trouble with the police, but lots of people would be angry with you. [Y] or [O] No names, but could get you in trouble. A lot of people would hate you , but its just opinion, it doesn't mean anything. Police wouldn't waste their time with it.
x	BH8C	[O] Just a bit out of order. Shouldn't say it, but I don't think you'd be arrested. Sued if it was about someone in particular. [R] because it's really bad to say that. Could be [O] it's not really against a group though.
x	BH9C	[R] could be arrested on suspicion of rape? Admitted it? They haven't named anyone so [Y]. [Y] it's just an opinion. Who's going to sue? It's really bad, but they're not done anything. [Y].
x	BH10C	[R] Really arrogant thing to say. So nasty. Just saying it [Y] Talking about it happening, not committing a crime. Just think he's stupid to say it. [R] He's basically saying he would rape someone. [Y] Own opinion and he's said why he thinks it. [O] Not threatening someone, but might get in trouble. Could be sued by rape victims?
x	BH12C	Told off [Y]. Not directed at anyone. Not saying he will rape someone. Not named anyone so he can't be sued. Really bad, but he's put #justsaying so it's it's just opinion. [Y] Bit controversial.
f	BH13C	[Y] Not an actual risk. Haven't done anything. Just espressing an opinion. Nothing illegal.
m	SB13C	[Y] implying her fault. Not criminal, not raped someone, not saying you should. It's against what most people think. [R] all over. Disgusting. Should be put in prison, as they could've done it [raped someone]

[D] "Massive delays @HeathrowAirport. If they don't get it sorted in the next fifteen minutes…… BOOM!!!!!!"

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
f	SB7D	[O] Threatening to blow up. [R] threatening to blow up the airport, surely. CAN be arrested for a terrorism threat. [O] Not serious. Not actually done anything yet. 'BOOM' = really angry! Just a [Y] yellow they hate Heathrow. They wouldn't actually do it.
x	BH7D	[R] Terrorist. You're saying you're going to blow up the airport. [O] You don't know if its real. It could just be an angry person. You don't know what they mean when they say "BOOM". Could be an emotional outburst [student indicates someone losing their temper, throwing their hands up in the air as in 'I've had enough']. Could be a joke, just messing around. [Y] 'cause they could be joking. Loads of people say [things like] that. it doesn't mean they're going to do it. [R] because they [the police/security] have to assume the worse, if they don't know. Could sue if the police arrested you and [a bomb] its not there.
x	SB8D	[R] Terrorist attack. 'Boom' suggests explosives. Saying they're gonna blow up Heathrow! Police would get involved. It's really clear that's what it's saying.
x	BH8D	[R] Terrorism. Bomb threat. Might be a joke, not serious. [R] Threatning to blow up an airpot. [R] It's happened before and someone got arrested.
x	BH9D	[R] Arrested for a threat. Terrorism and bombs. Threatening to bomb an airport. If you mention the word bomb you'd get arrested, if they have any suspicions. I heard a news story similar to this, and the girl did get arrested so [R]. It's taken seriously.
x	BH10D	[R] Saying you'll blow up a plane! Threat. No other things to say he's just joking. Mentioned Heathrow Airport. Probably doesn't mean it, but still red [R]. [Y] or [O] He doesn't actually say he's going to bomb it.
x	BH12D	Threat. [R] Also tagged heathrow airport so it would worry people. Might be saying it so it sounds good as a joke when people read. [R] Direct threat. [G] "BOOM" - might mean 'I'll just leave! Walk out!' Not necessarily a bomb. [O] or [Y]… Don't know. Not clear from the writing what the meaning is. It could be funny, like if they're off on a lads' holiday.
f	BH13D	[R] Terrorist threat. Even though it's posted to be funny it could be perceived as threatening. Not intended to be, but still could be arrested.
m	SB13D	[R] even a joke would have to be taken seriously, as if it's an actual threat. Terrorism.

[E] "I'm sick to death of ******ing dykes round here! I swear I'm gonna smack the next one I see in the face!"

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
F	SB7E	Offensive. Swearing. Saying you're going to smack someone. [O] Get sued - by lesbians. [Y] Serious saying it but I don't think anything would happen to you. [Y] Could get banned from social media, but not arrested or sued.
x	BH7E	[R] it's threatening. [O] they're not actually doing it. Not actually hurting anyone, not a criminal offence. [R] it's like a hate crime. Hating lesbians. [R] Homophobic language. Also it's a threat.
x	SB8E	[O] Wouldn't get arrested but could get sued. Homophobic to lesbians. Could be assault, if violence then [R]. Could upset them [I asked 'who?'] People, lesbians, anyone. [Y] because if you have friends who are lesbians, you'd upset them [by saying this]. Just a bit rude - expressing an opinion. [R] cause it's a threat to a type of person.
x	BH8E	[Y] Doesn't say 'gay'? [R] Homophobia, could be arrested. It's a hate crime. [O] Because what are you going to do to people who say worse [things than that]? People say that kind of thing a lot and don't get arrested. [O] Just saying you're going to hit someone, so it's not too extreme.
x	BH9E	[R] You can't say your opinion [like this] and get away with it, because we don't have freedom of speech here [i.e. in UK]. [Y] Not serious. Not threatening anyone. [O] Homosexual comment? [means homophobic - another student corrects him]. [O] If you tagged someone then you could get sued, but if not it's just more general so [Y]. [R] because it's a threat to a specific group of people.
x	BH10E	[Y] Threatening, but not actually going to do it. It is offensive but it's not a threat to anyone. [Y] He's just frustrated. [Y] Says he's going to smack the next lesbian he sees? Could be sued? [O] [I prompt 'by who'?] By all lesbians? [this gets a giggle/laugh from others]
F	BH12E	Quite bad. Aggression and swearing. Offensive terms, homophobic. Lots of people are gay so it could put lots of people at risk. Don't need to handle it like that [meaning people need to chill out], it's unneccassary. [Y]. Told off. Maybe more than told off, but not an orange. [Y] [R] Sort of a direct threat...
X	BH13E	[Y] Serious if it was carried out. But there's not much they're going to do about a tweet. Not a direct threat, more general. Okay to say, not to do.
X	SB13E	[Y] threatening but doesn't mention anyone. Not at anyone. Homophobic. No violence to anyone, direct.

[F] "Waiting at the gates for my little friend. This time he won't even be able to walk once I'm finished"

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
F	SB7F	[R] sounds like a threat. Sounds like a bully! [O] The person it's aimed at could sue? Anyone reading it [could sue]. Threatening to hurt someone but on social media it could be anyone. It's not directed at a specific person. [R] Disability Hate Crime.
x	BH7F	[R] Also threatening. [O] Orange? [said like a question] Not actually saying it to his face. But they are waiting? Saying it, but not going to do it. [R] cause they're actually there and waiting. Also "this time" so it's not the first time [they've done this]. [R] If police did arrest them, they might have to investigate why [they said it] 'cause there might be a reason. 'Little friend' sounds like an older person towards a younger person. Like they're going to beat them up badly [R]. [O] you don't know if they're joking or not, but you could sue anyway so [O]. [O] or [Y] Don't know what they're actually saying.
x	SB8F	Abuse or rape. 100% red [R]. Really violent, suggesting beating up. Might not do it, but have done it before ['this time']. [Y] because they probably met the person online and it's not really a criminal offennce. What if the person can't walk ['is disabled'] or WANTS to do it? Maybe its his or her son and they're in a wheelchair? [G] cause it could be a joke.
x	BH8F	[Y] or [O] You've threatened to beat someone up. You're not going to be sued. [Y]. [G] It's not that bad. [Y].
x	BH9F	[O] You could be sued by the kid's parents. [Y] in trouble with your parents or his parents. [R] You've threatened to break his legs! [O] civil risk, so maybe sued? It's worse than yellow [but not a red]. [R] didn't say you're going to hit them but could be physical assault or rape? 'little friend' suggests they're older.
x	BH10F	[R] Cause they're already there and planning to do it - beat him up. [R] It's a direct threat. [O] Pretty bad, but they've not actually done anything.
F	BH12F	Quite threatening. Not [R] or [O] though. Taken quite seriously. Nothings actually happened. Don't know, if they went through with it, but it could've been a quote from a film. Might mean something else, not literal, just like an inside joke or a code. It is threatening, but I think yellow [Y]. Don't know the context. Could be innocent, the more I read it, the more I think it's actually worse. Could be a paedophile?
X	BH13F	[R] Admitting they're a paedophile. Could be used as evidence. Could be used against them in court. Suggesting they've done it before [I ask what to clarify] - had sex with a child. [R] I didn't identify it as paedophilia at first, just thought they meant beat up, but if he did do it [as in attack them] they could be arrested. [R] Threat of violence. "This time" suggests they've done it before. [Y] Could be a sexual partner?
X	SB13F	Nowadays police are more up for investigating this stuff, because of recent events. [I ask what he means]. Operation Yewtree. [Might get a...] Warning. Weirdly sexual. Authorities wouldn't take it seriously because it's not explicit. Could be fine. Phrases heavily implied children. It's [R] but depends if you'd done something wrong.

[G] "You gotta watch this video of Alice. What a massive slut. Youtube.com"

M/F/X	Group	Quotes
X	SB7G	Probably [O] because the school could be in trouble for bullying? Sounds like they hate her. [R]? [Y] Depends on what the video is. Rude word. Could be between friends? Embarassing - stuff she doesn't want everyone to see. Lots of people could see it if it's on YouTube. [Promted: If sexual/naked video, then what?] then [R] Don't want to see that. It's something between you and the other person, noone else.
F	BH7G	[O] or [Y]. If they thought the video was funny? They've not tagged someone. Could be told off by your parents for watching something you shouldn't be. If you've told someone to watch it and it's someone else's video, she could get into trouble [i.e. Alice]. It's a rude video. Video [of Alice] She could be under 18. The way they've shared in on YouTube [R]. Girl could've taken the video herself, so you couldn't go to prison, so [O] or [Y]. [O] if she did do the video she might want it to be confidential might not want people to see it, but it is her fault anyway for sending it, but she could still sue [O]. [O] or [R] if she didn't want anyone to see it, also underage people might see it! [O] It's on social media, that's not good. It's not suitable for younger age. It's not a nice thing to call people a 'slut'. It's disrespectful and might make her feel bad about herself. Really insecure. [O] Person sharing it shouldn't be. If she sent it to someone then [O].
F	SB8G	[O] sharing a video of someone and saying something bad [about them]. Not very nice, and there's a video link. [I asked what they thought the video content might be] Showing her body, might be drunk. It's one thing to post something [online] but spreading it is worse, if she didn't want it [shared]. Could be blackmail? [R] Sharing videos, if it's porn you and they could be arrested if they're underage? [Y] Only social media so it could be a funny video.
X	BH8G	[O] or [Y]. Not that bad. Just bad language. [Y] Calling someone a slut isn't that bad. Alice might not see it or even care? [O] Can't put someone all over the Internet in a video without their permission. [R] or [O] If its private then they don't want anyone to see it. [R] Hate crime about the way they're different? [to everyone else]
X	BH9G	[O] or [Y] Can't you get in trouble for posting something without someone's permission? It's insulting. Everyone's going to watch it and it's private. If you're 18 then it's fine, if underage then orange [O]. Sued by Alice's family. Copyright issue so [O] depends if you're sharing a video that's yours or not yours. Alice could press charges, depending on her age. Inappropriate content, young people could just click on it so [R] also it's hateful towards Alice.
F	BH10G	[O] Don't know the age of the girl, could be underage. Could be shared without her permission. If it's child pornography then [R], if they're under 16 or 18. It's illegal. Weird. Distributing it. If she's over the age then depends on the video, if it's not very nice then [O] she would sue who did it, if she doesn't want it shared. [R] It's cyberbullying.
X	BH12G	If Alice put up the video [herself] then [G]. You've made your bed, you've got to lie in it. If another person did, then [O] cause there's no consent. [Y] If I said it or spread it, but didn't put up the video [in the first place]. [O] Alice could sue, if he named her.
F	BH13G	Bad but could be worse. If Alice is a child and it's an old man posting it then [R] red, but if it's between to friends, like a joke, then yellow [Y]. [O] If the link was damaging or something personal then Alice could sue. [R] or [O] if posting something without her consent and she looks bad then that's a crime. [R] or [O] Sounds sexual. Posting without her consent is a crime.
X	SB13G	She's put it up then [its] confidential, not her [putting it up] then no consent, so [O]. If she's underage then [R]. [I ask, what age] 16? 18? Consent? It's a sexual video. If Alice put it up then [G]. [O] if no consent.

[H] "Peter: You are GAY. Everyone knows you love men, don't you?!"

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
X	SB7H	[Y] Not everyone knows him. It's public, that means everyone can see it. [O] Could be true. If true, could be joking so [Y] if it's mean then maybe [O]. If you are gay you shouldn't be embarassed, if not [gay] then it's bad. Might not be saying it's bad, just saying it. Being quite rude, but [they're] friends.
F	BH7H	[O] 'cause Peter could sue the guy saying it. It's about his sexuality. It's being rude about the fact that he's gay. He'd be unhappy if he got that. [R] it's homophobic. That's a criminal offence. [O] or [Y] if it's true, 'cause it's just speaking the truth, if it's not true then [R]. [Y] because it's not physical asssault, but it is kind of assault [verbal/with words].
F	SB8H	[O] More than social risk. Trying to make fun [of Peter]. [Y] Because there's nothing wrong with being gay. Labelling him. Could be told off. Homophobic, not a nice way of saying it [that someone is gay]
X	BH8H	[R] or [O] Using 'gay' in a homophobic way. [R] homophobic language. You can get arrested. [G] or [Y] because it's not saying that it's bad [to be gay] they're just saying 'you're gay'. [Y] it's not anything bad. [O] If someone calls you gay, wouldn't you do something about it?!
X	BH9H	[O] Insulting, not respecting [Peter's] privacy, and what they like [sexual preference]. [R] person who posted it said their name. [Y] If they are gay that's quite offensive. If they're not gay, that's also quite offensive but maybe an orange? [O]. Maybe [R]. [O] or [Y] If it's not true then you're spreading rumours that harm his reputation.
F	BH10H	[Y] Cause it's not saying it's dirty or gross. The word 'gay' is not an insult, not offensive, it just a word you use. Would be told off, because you can't just say "You're gay" to someone. Shouldn't say it like that.
X	BH12H	[G] Harmless. Not saying you're gay and it's bad. If he was gay he could just comment back and say "yes". Stating a fact. If he's not then still [G] because h'ed just say "NO". Not really offensive. One person saying it is okay, if loads of people were saying it, it'd be worse. Could be offensive if he's not gay.
F	BH13H	Don't know the context, it depends how you read it. [Y] Could be a joke? Obviously it still could be offensive. I mean, you shouldn't say it but… [Shrugs as if to say 'not a big deal'] Depending on who it is, if its friends then [G]/ Using "gay" as derrogatory. It's bullying. [Y].
X	SB13H	[O] Making an assumption. Derogatory. Liberachi sued [people] for saying he was gay. Slander. If Peter is not gay, right to sue.

[l] "Jenny is a right slag. She loves giving it out. Especially to Mr. Sanders in the French classroom afterschool."

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
X	SB7l	[Y] The only bad thing is 'giving it out' [comment]. It's not good to have a relationship with a teacher, if it's true then [Y] if false, then [O]. [O] It's not a good thing to say. If true then it's illegal. If not [arrested/criminal] then [you could be] in trouble.
F	BH7l	[Y] 'cause it's to do with school. [O] You're saying something about a teacher and a student. That they're doing stuff. [O] because Jenny or Mr Sanders could sue, because you're spreading rumours. If true then green [G]. It might not be true, might be wrong. Might be true [O]. [R] or [O] the teacher might be doing it with an underage girl and he could get arrested. The girl could be in trouble too.
X	SB8l	[Y] About someone in school, could be sued or in trouble [the person who wrote it]. Get Jenny into trouble, bad about Jenny. [Y] or [O], in between. [R] if it was true the person would get the teacher arrested. Person who sent it is abusing the situation.
X	BH8l	[O] or [Y] because still wrong in what it's saying, you'd get told off, or maybe sued by the teacher. I don't think you'd be arrested. It's not as if it's just… I don't know. I'd say [O] for sued. [R] saying stuff about a teacher on social media you'd get in really bad trouble. You're putting the teacher's job at risk [R]. [O] Teacher could sue you for saying that. Something about spreading rumours, so i think [O] or [R]. Maybe just [Y], not [R].
X	BH9l	[O] Could get the teacher arrested or lose his job. It's a lie, so you could be sued for that. If it's true then it's not your business to post that. If true then [R] because you've given out the names of people doing a crime. Teacher could lose his job if its not true, and could also sue if it's false. [R] Giving away the name of who it is? Isn't that illegal? If not true then it's naming and shaming the girl and the teacher, his reputation would be ruined. [R] because you're calling a teacher a paedophile, they [the police] would have to check that out.
F	BH10l	If true then [R] red because it's an older person and a younger person, a teacher and an underage child. If it's a joke then yellow [Y] cause it's not really offensive. [O] Mr Sanders could sue if it's not true. [O] You're saying a teacher is a paedophile. [R] because you're involving him - Mr Sanders. If a jury sees it, it could sway them to not give him a fair trial.
F	BH12l	[Y] I think you'd get told off for this. Harsh about the teacher. Sued? Its about someone, personal information, but said to everyone. Could be false, it probably is, that's a lie, then [O]? [Y], Whether true or false. [O] if it's not true, made up, also bullying Jenny. Maybe the teacher would notice, but noone else would. [R] He could get arrested, people thinking he's a paedophile, and he's like "I'm not". Could ruin his life and his lose his job.
F	BH13l	Calling jenny a slag and the teacher… School could sue? [Y] but also [O] as it names Mr Sanders. The school or the head could sue, because you're making an accusation.
M	SB13l	Just a statement. Offensive. Could become a self-fulfilling prophecy? ("slag") [Y] Not criminal, nothing illegal if true or false. Risk the teacher could lose his job or she could get into trouble if she's underage.

[J] "Beyonce is nothing but an ugly black slut. She should just *****ing jump off a building"

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
X	SB7J	[O] Telling them to committ suicide. Swearing, being rude. Racist: "black". Not like over the top, like stealing something or killing someone. They just don't like her. Not bad enough to be red. [R] bad language, racist and telling her to kill herself)
F	BH7J	[R] It's racism. "Black" [comment] is racist. [O] because she is famous she could sue.
X	SB8J	[O] Judging her on her looks and her race. Racist. [G] It's being rude and disrespectful, but not a lot to get you into trouble.
X	BH8J	[R] cause it's racist towards Beyonce. You'd get 6 months in jail. Suicidal as well. Celebrities read mean tweets out all the time and I don't think these people get into trouble. [O] or [Y]. There's loads of them. Might just get their account blocked? [Beyonce] is well known so a [R] or an [O] - Whoever wrote it is just jealous.
X	BH9J	Racist, so yellow [Y]. Might not be the famous one, could be another Beyonce. [O] if it's the famous one then she could sue. Isn't that hate speech? [R]
F	BH10J	Really offensive. [R] or [O]. Racism and swearing. [R] threatening.
F	BH12J	[Y] Beyonce's people [staff] would just ignore it. She gets so many messages a day. She wouldn't read it. If she saw it she might sue, but chances of her seeing it are slim. Quite threatening. If Alan Davies said it [this is in reference to a chat we'd had earlier re: Lord McAlpine twitter libel] and loads of people could see it then [O]. She gets a lot of this. Wouldn't bother chasing up.
F	BH13J	Quite racist. Offensive. [O] [I ask who would sue?] - Beyonce won't care, she's a celebrtity. It's not the same as if you said it to a friend. She won't see it. [O] but if to a friend then [R]. [Y] You'd probably just be told to take it down or delete it off social media. [O] Beyonce could sue.
M	SB13J	[R] "Black" is not racist, just a description. [Y] To a specific person. Discrimination. Not friendly. Not bad for a celebrity - expected all the time. Just some guy's opinion.

[K] "Collingwood college is an absolute dump. Anyone who sends their kinds there is basically guitly of child neglect"

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
X	SB7K	[Y] Only rude to the school. No bad words. Bit rude. Affecting the parents. Bit over the top.
X	BH7K	Green [G]. It's dumb, but not in trouble. If you googled the school it coud actually be helpful, you're telling people not to go there. [Y] Making other people out to be bad parents [for sending their kids there].
X	SB8K	[G] It's just what he thinks. Can say its a bad school. It's personal opinion, can't get you into trouble. School could kick them out. Personal opinion
X	BH8K	[O] College could sue for saying it's bad. You've named the school and said it's a dump. [Y] Saying it's a dump is not that bad. They might not even see it [G].
X	BH9K	[O] Could be sued for saying it, by the school. [O] Sued for slander about the school, if it's not been proved. Hate speech towards the parents?
X	BH10K	[Y] Only an opinion, but it could offend people, like teachers or parents or the students. [G] It might offend some people, but it's still okay. Saying "Man city is a bad football team" will offend someone.
M	BH12K	[Y] Bad. Negative. But opinion. Categorises people as bad people [i.e. parents] which is offensive. Gives it [the school] a bad name.
M	BH13K	Someone with not many followers would be okay [Y]/ If they're got a large number of followers then [O] Sued, maybe by a student ot a parent. Could just be told off… For example, if I tweeted "[names his school] is a dump", then noone would care.
X	SB13K	[Y] [if] posted online, [it would] put others off going.. Strong thing to say. Inappropriate. Not at an individual, no target.

[L] "Ah, *. Got double science first thing. On a monster hangover. #LifeSucks"***

M/F/X	Group [SH]	Quotes
X	SB7L	[Y] Not too bad. Bit rude. Just saying life sucks. Swearing, not blaming anyone, their own fault if they're hungover.
X	BH7L	[G] Green. Even swearing is the only thing wrong. Could be drunk? [Y] If your age was under 14 or under 18 then [R]. [O] told off. You are allowed to drink. [G] Could mean Monster energy drink. Also you can drink at 16.
X	SB8L	[Y] depends on age. Older = [Y], Younger = [O] Because children aren't allowed to drink. It's bad to drink. Rude to swear. [G] if they're older, like 18.
X	BH8L	Told off? [Y] for the swearing. Saying that school is annoying, you might be in trouble with the school. [G] Nothing wrong. It's not offensive, you're just saying you don't like science. [Y] Told off for coming into school with a bad head. [Y] If too young [to drink], depends how old. [Y] if too young and [G] if older.
X	BH9L	[Y] Reputation? Or could be [R] red if drinking and you're at school. If you're at school and drinking it might be underage drinking. Not a legal risk. A hangover means you've been drinking, so you could be excluded [Y]. [O] Sued for drinking.
X	BH10L	[Y] Reputation. People wouldn't respect you for that. [G] saying what he thinks. If they're under 18 then it's underage drinking so [O] or [R].
M	BH12L	[G] Just opinion. Whatever they want to say, it doesn't offend anyone else. If underage then [Y] - If the teacher or parents saw it. Still a [G], even if underage, cause they could've had a birthday party at the weekend, and had a couple of glasses of wine.
M	BH13L	[Y] School would tell you off. You'd be in trouble for coming in with a hangover. Could be nothing. [G] Everyone complains about everything on social media. Everyone complains about school. Nothing would happen. School wouldn't pick up on it. If you're like 13 then it's an issue.

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